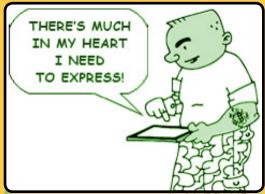
SOMETHING TO Write About:

Writing Prompts for English Language Learners and Literacy Students









by Bill Zimmerman

Creator, <u>Somethingtowriteabout.com</u> and <u>MakeBeliefsComix.com</u>

Art by Tom Bloom



This Book Belongs To

(TYPE YOUR NAME HERE)

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Writing Prompts for English Language Learners and Literacy Students



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Creator, Somethingtowriteabout.com and MakeBeliefsComix.com

Art by Tom Bloom

An Interactive Digital Journal from MakeBeliefsComix.com

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Book design: Barbara Berasi

The author welcomes comments and suggestions about what you would like to see included in future editions.

Please write to: William Zimmerman, Guarionex Press Ltd. 201 West 77 Street, New York, NY 10024. Thank you.

For other books by Bill Zimmerman, visit http://www.billztreasurechest.com or http://www.makebeliefscomix.com

The comic characters used throughout this book were drawn by Tom Bloom and created for MakeBeliefsComix.com.

DEDICATION

In memory of my grandparents who immigrated to the United States from Europe and who struggled to learn the English language.

I also dedicate this book to my students who used many of the writing prompts in this book and who always wrote wonderful things from their hearts.



And special thanks
for their support and encouragement
to Donna Kelsh, Executive Director,
and Mark Brik, Education Director,
Institute for Immigrant Concerns, New York City,
and to Ken English, Literacy Program Director
at New York Public Library.
All three people widened my world and gave me
an opportunity to try new ideas.

—BZ

A Word to Teachers and Students...

Write from your heart! It speaks your special truth.



Dear Reader,

This book is about nothing other than things to write about...your family, your friends, your old life and your new life, feelings, dreams and goals.

I created this book of writing prompts over the years teaching English language learners and literacy students. Its intent is to help students discover their writers' voices and express the rich thoughts within them as they master the English language.

These writing prompts encourage students of all ages to write about the things in their lives that are meaningful to them—their childhood memories and family stories, the people they love and admire, their hopes for the future, their deepest beliefs. I have always believed that everyone has a story to tell—if only someone would ask, if only someone would listen. This book gives teachers a way to draw out students' stories and help them communicate their thoughts through writing.

Encouraging immigrant students to write is so important because it helps them better weather the enormous stress they experience as they learn their hard-won English language and adjust to life in a new land far away from their original homes. Students have told me that they often feel overwhelmed by the pressures of adjusting to a new country and hide their feelings, keeping them locked inside. Writing can change this, writing has the power to help us find self-understanding and hope and take pride in our lives. As someone who was very shy and verbally inarticulate as a child, as someone who had difficulty speaking up, I remember the power I felt when I began to express my ideas on paper and have those ideas read by others. Even today, I'd rather write than talk.

Much of my work in encouraging students to write is to help them tap into the memories which feed and nurture them. By asking students to recall their past, teachers help them reveal the great richness of their lives. From the stories they write about their lives and then read in class, we learn from these writers that they are more than just struggling students who are trying to improve their English skills. We recognize them as full human beings with a history behind them and a future ahead. They are worthy of our respect and deserve to be heard.

In using the writing prompts in the classroom, I usually also provide some reading material that will relate to the prompt we will use that day. For example, if we are to write about a favorite relative or friend, I might provide as handouts a short essay, newspaper clipping or book excerpt in which the writer talks about such a person. Students take turns reading this aloud. Then we discuss the content. All this prepares students to think about the day's subject. (A rich resource for such handouts is the excellent annual Literacy Review of immigrants' writings published by New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study—http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/undergraduate/writing/literacyproject.html.)



As my students write, I play a CD with some quiet, meditative music to help them relax and get in touch with their memories and thoughts. The music helps transform the classroom into a sacred writing space where the most wonderful writing is done.

When the students complete their pieces, they are encouraged to read aloud what they have written. Doing so helps validate the importance of the thoughts they have expressed in their written words and broadens the thinking of the other students. We quickly learn that each of us has something valuable to impart to others. Students also are welcome to first experiment with their essay ideas by creating a comic strip at MakeBeliefsComix.com, another useful resource for the classroom.

I hope that this book of writing prompts will spark your imagination as you develop your own writing ideas. I hope, too, that by using these prompts you will discover many special things about your students' lives. They want someone to read and listen to their special stories. This book pays honor to them.

Sincerely,

Bel ZimmerMon

Bill Zimmerman

Creator, Somethingtowriteabout.com and MakeBeliefsComix.com

P.S. This book is formatted as an interactive digital journal. When downloaded, it will allow your students to type directly on their computer screens into the areas with lines on the blank pages that face the writing prompts. When a student is done typing, simply save the document until the next time she or he is inspired to make new entries. Students also can print out any pages that they want.

You can find additional writing ideas in the other MakeBeliefsComix e-books:

- <u>Hummingbird Joy</u>: A Book of All the Things That Make You Happy
- <u>Laptop Letters</u>: Sending Wise & Loving Messages to Young People in Your Life
- Make Beliefs to Spark Your Writing: Words I Wish Someone Had Told Me As a Kid
- MakeBeliefsComix FILL-ins

And please try out the many writing ideas at my writing blog, <u>Somethingtowriteabout.com</u>.

Writing Prompts to Spark Your Imagination...





Write About Your Dreams

In her poem, "In Praise of Dreams," Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska, who received the Nobel Prize in Literature, talks about all the wonderful things she can do in her dreams. She can write great poems, play the piano, breathe underwater and even see two suns. In other words, there are no limits to the amazing things she can accomplish or experience in her dreams.

Her poem begins:

In my dreams
I paint like Vermeer van Delft.
I speak fluent Greek
And not only with the living.
I drive a car
Which obeys me.

Why don't you read her full poem—at http://in-praise-of-dreams.blogspot.com/2008/12/in-praise-of-dreams-wislawa-szymborska.html—and add some of your own lines to what she wrote? You can write about all your fantasies. In your poem, if you wish, you can start with these words: In my dreams, I…

Or, if you prefer, write about a dream that you once had or which often comes back to you when you sleep.

Or, write about the dreams which you have for your own future or for someone you care about deeply. You can even write about a dream that did come true.

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Make Up A Story From A Picture Or Photo

Turn the pages of a magazine or newspaper to find an illustration which captures your interest. Look carefully at this picture and try to imagine or make up a story about what is going on.

For example, who are the people in the picture? What is going on in their lives? Imagine you knew them and could tell about their lives, about their problems, their loves, their hates, their hopes and dreams. What are the

lives of the people in the photograph like? Are the people happy, sad, angry or what? Make up a story.

You can also try to imagine that you are one of the people in the picture? What is going on in your mind? What do you feel?

If you like you can write about this person in the first person narrative. By that I mean you can use the word "I", such as:

- I am ----
- I feel ----
- I want ----
- I am going to tell you the story of my life ----
- My name is ----

Don't be afraid of trying to become someone in the picture you are examining. That is why your imagination is so wonderful. It can take you to new places where you have never been before. By trying to put yourself in the shoes or lives of another person, you will grow and develop a broader picture of humanity.

Or, if you prefer, instead, you can also write a description or story about something or someone you saw on the streets, or on the subway or in class or at a party. Use your imagination to describe what is going on.

Or, perhaps you choose an illustration of a place or scene that you find interesting. What would it be like to step into that scene?

Enjoy!

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Write Their Diaries For The Day

Three people in three different parts of the world wake up one morning, each expecting the day to be like all the others. But for one, in Mexico, this will turn into the most important day of her life. For another, in China, the day will be the happiest she will ever experience. And for the third, in Chicago, this will become his saddest day.

Write each of these people's diaries for the day.

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Help This Girl Write A Personal Essay For A Scholarship

A 15 year-old girl is forced to leave her homeland because of ethnic hatred and she arrives in New York. Her family has lost everything and must start from scratch. Three years later she graduates from high school with high marks. She has a chance for a college scholarship which will educate her and allow her to earn a good living that will help her parents (her father works as a janitor).

On her scholarship application she writes about how she transformed personal bitterness into determination. She begins this way: "A man's soul is harder than a rock."

Now, your job is to help her finish her application. What does the rest of her essay say? What does she write about the challenges and hardships of her life? How did she overcome them? How did she find hope and the strength to keep her spirit strong?

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Write About A Good Friend

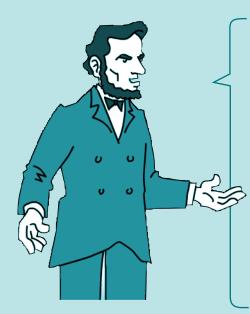
Who would you say is your best friend? Maybe he or she is a child-hood friend whom you knew when you were very young, living in your homeland. Maybe that person is a relative, such as a brother or sister, or mother or father, or cousin. Maybe your best friend is a grand-parent. Maybe your best friend is your spouse or partner. Or maybe your best friend is someone whom you just met in this country.

For some people, their best friend may be a cat or dog or some animal they can talk to and who loves them unconditionally. I remember that my own dog, Nena, always was there to help me when I felt sad and alone. She would come to lick my face and cheer me up.

Why is this person or creature your best friend? What makes them so special? What is their name? What kinds of things do you do together or talk about? Did you have adventures with this good friend? Did you have happy or sad times together? Why do you feel so comfortable with this person?

If you don't have a best friend, then write about a person whom you admire or like. Or write about what it means to be a good friend to someone.

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Let's Write About Courage

Write about a time you when you acted with courage in dealing with a problem in your life. Each of us has had to overcome some fears we had by taking action. This might be as simple as taking a test again after you failed an earlier one, or flying on an airplane when you're afraid of planes, or overcoming your fear of leaving your country to come to a foreign land to start a new life.

Some people have severe health problems, but they still find the courage and strength within to live successful and happy lives. If you know such a person, you can write about her or him.

You can also write about an act of courage that you or someone you know performed and how they must have felt.

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Describe Something or Someone You Observed

Your assignment is to look carefully at the world around you and write something special that you observed. I am encouraging you to be a private detective and use your powers of observation.

As you ride the bus, or take the train, or walk down the streets to school or your home, look very carefully around you and focus your attention on someone or something. Try to notice something you have never seen before, something that you are glad you saw, such as a flower bulb starting to open or a laughing child. Maybe something strange or mysterious, or something that surprises you.

Maybe you observe an interesting looking person wearing a beautiful or shabby outfit. Maybe you see a special color that cheers you up. Maybe you see an adorable or frightening animal. Or, maybe you overhear an interesting conversation between two people. What do they say to each other?

Maybe you wish to describe someone you already know. Help us see what this person looks like, how tall or short they are, the color of their skin and hair, whether they look sad or happy, whether they are fat or thin, whether they speak loudly or softly. How are they dressed? Describe as much as you can.

Try to use adjectives when you describe an object or person. For example, don't just write, "I saw an apple." Tell me more. Tell me the color of the apple—was it green or red or yellow, was it juicy looking? Was it a Chinese apple (a pomegranate) or was it a Delicious apple. What does it say on the label attached to the apple's skin? Where did you see the apple? Was it at home on the table? Was it on the shelf in the store with other fruit? Was someone eating that apple, and if so, how did the person look? Did the person look like she enjoyed the taste of the apple? What did the apple make you think of? Did it make you remember a time when you were a child, in another country, and tasted an apple or some other fruit for the first time? If so, what was it like?

In writing your description, try to use some of your five senses—what did the object smell like, or feel like, or sound like, or taste like, or look like?

Make your descriptions so complete and clear that readers will feel that they saw what you saw, too. Remember, you are our reporter; we rely on your words.

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Describe The Home Where You Lived As A Child

Write a detailed description of your home so that we can see where you lived as a child.

- Where was your first home? (Name the city or province and country)
- Did you live in a house or an apartment?
- Was your home big or small?
- Was it crowded or spacious?
- Where did you sleep?
- Can you remember the smells?
- Can you remember the sounds you heard in your home and the sounds outside your door or window?
- What did you see from your window or door?
- Can you remember the food you ate as a child? What was your favorite?
- Who lived in your home?
- Was it quiet or noisy?
- Were you happy or sad in that home?
- Were there pictures on the walls? Of what?
- What colors were the walls?
- Were there plants or animals in your home?
- What was the floor or rugs like?
- What was your favorite space or room?
- What were your favorite possessions as a child?
- Did you sleep in your own bed or with someone else?
- Were there books or music in your home? If so, what kind?
- Did you have a television? A radio? A computer?

Think of your five senses when you describe your childhood home—what did things smell like, taste like, feel like, look like, sound like?

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What Would You Write On Your Body To Reflect Something Very Important About You?

Robert X. Fogarty takes pictures of people who have written, usually on their bodies, a note to the world. Then he posts those pictures on his Facebook site, https://www.face-book.com/dearworld.

One young person writes, "Never Give Up." Another says, "Fight Off the Demons." One writes, "But Still, Like Dust, I Rise." And another, a Boston Marathon amputee, writes on her knees, "Still Standing."

What about you? If you were posing for such a picture showing writing on your own body, what would your message say?

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Write A Letter To A Friend Whom You Haven't Seen For A Long Time

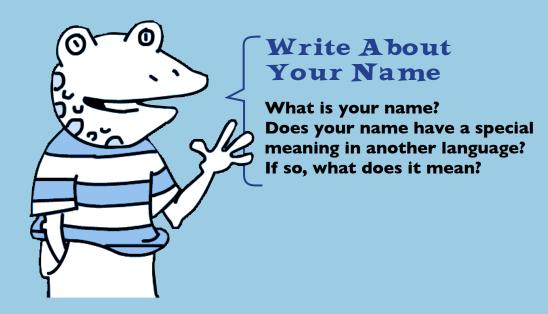
Sit in a quiet place and think of an old friend or relative whom you have not seen in a long time. Share your life with your friend by writing a letter to this person.

Tell him or her about some of the important things that have happened to you in your life since you last met. Before you write your letter, make some notes about two or three of the most important changes in your life. Perhaps one of the changes is your moving to a new country. Perhaps another change is your adjusting to a new life which is different from the life that you knew in your former homeland—what is different now?

Perhaps you have returned to school or have a new love or even a child who has been born to you. Perhaps you are working in a new job. Or, perhaps you have changed a lot from the person you once were. Maybe you have lost a family member. There are happy and sad things you want to tell that person. Have you had some funny or strange experiences that you wish to share? What are the important things you want to tell your friend?

In writing your letter, imagine that your friend is in the room with you and that you are having a conversation together. Perhaps you have a photograph of your friend that you can look at while you are writing your letter to him or her. What would you say to that friend or relative?

TYPE/ WRITE HERE



- Who gave you your name?
- Were you named after someone special?
- Do you like or hate your name?
- If you could choose another name for yourself what would it be? Why would you call yourself that name?
- What names of other people do you like? Why?
- Do you think you were given the right name, or should you have been named something different?
- What is your favorite name?
- How do you feel when people speak your name?
- Do you know your name in other languages?
- Have you ever given someone a name? How did you choose it?

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Do You Remember A Story That Someone Told You When You Were A Child?

When I was a child I would sit under the kitchen table when my relatives came to my home and I'd listen to the stories that they told one another when they were eating at the table. I remember, too, my uncle coming home from the war, his holding me in his lap and together we'd look at a painting on the wall. He'd then make up a story for me about the scene shown in the painting. I loved hearing his stories.

What about you? When you were growing up, did you have a favorite story that your parents or relatives would tell you or read to you? Was there a story or legend that was passed down from generation to generation that was also told to you? Share it now. It can be a funny story, or a happy story, or a sad story or a very scary story. Perhaps you are telling this same story to your own child today. Did you have a favorite story book with pictures, and was there one particular story or illustration that you loved? If so, try to remember it by writing about it.

Or, if you like, make up your own story or fairy tale and tell it to us.

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What Did This Man Tell Himself To Help Him Survive?

A man is buried to his neck at the bottom of a 15-foot hole as a result of a construction accident. Every time his lungs expand, then contract, more dirt fills in around him, tightening around his stocky frame "like a slowly coiling boa constrictor," reports a newspaper. It is a race against time, but after eight hours the rescuers lift him to safety although he is nearly buried alive three times during this emotionally-wrenching rescue effort.

Afterward, you interview the man and ask him what was going on in his mind all the while. You want to know what he was thinking. You want to know what kept him going and not give up. This is what he answers:

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Tell The Story Of An Immigrant

Imagine that you know this immigrant (perhaps it is you). Write the story of this person's life.

- Why did he or she come to the United States?
- Where did they come from?
- What are their hopes and dreams in coming to this new country?
- Did they leave their families behind in their former country?
- Are they happy, or afraid, or hopeful, or worried?
- What do they think about?
- What do they hope to accomplish in life?
- Will they have a hard or easy life in this country?
- What will be their future?
- What kind of work will they do? Will they get married and have a family?

Try to tell the story of this immigrant. You can start your essay in the first person with these words:

My name is	. I come from
,	

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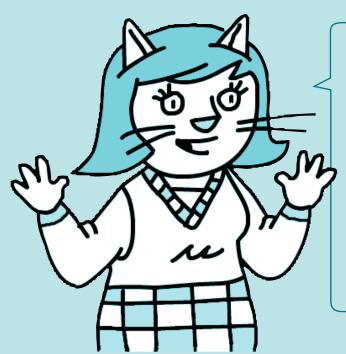
Write About Your Own Life

What is the most important thing that ever happened to you?

- What was your greatest adventure?
- Your biggest success?
- Your greatest failure?
- Your greatest accomplishment?
- Your deepest dream?
- Do you remember any especially funny or sad stories about your life?
 What are they?

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Write A Message Of Hope

An Indonesian boy leaves a message of hope written on a paper flower outside a mosque on the anniversary of the tsunami that killed thousands of people in his province. The flower messages are a beautiful way of marking an event or putting a prayer or spiritual thought on paper.

What messages of hope would you place on your paper flower?

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Select An Object To Help You Remember The Past, And Write About The Memory

Choose a favorite object from home. Perhaps it is an item you brought from your country to remind you about something or someone very important to you. Or, perhaps it is something you acquired while in this country or discovered when you were on a trip.

The object might be a photograph of someone you love or care about. It might be a pin or watch your mother or grandmother gave to you to remind you of them. Perhaps it is a letter, a book or poem, an herb or a food. Maybe it's a military or school medal of honor. Perhaps it is a childhood toy or something that belongs to someone you love. Maybe it is a sea shell or a stone you found at the beach or in the countryside.

Write about this object and tell us what it means to you. What memory does it bring to mind? Are your thoughts happy or sad? Why is this object so important to you? Is there a story about the object you can write about, such as who gave it to you or how you found it? Make up a story about this prized possession.

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What Kind Of Business Would You Like To Own? Or, What Kind of Job Would You Like to Have?

For many people the American dream is to own their own business. Each year thousands of people in the United States start their own small businesses or enterprises. We call them entrepreneurs.

This may include businesses that are food shops or restaurants, retail stores, home cleaning services, or a business that imports or exports products. Some businesses grow very successfully, but some fail because the owners do not have enough expertise or because the market is not large enough to support the services or products they provide. It's not easy having your own business—you worry about it all the time, you work long hours and can't take days off. But if you are successful, the rewards can be wonderful—wealth and independence and pride.

What about you? If you could start your own business, what kind of business would it be? Why would you choose this type of business? Do you have any experience in this field of work? What special skills do you have that would help you in your business? Do you think there is a need or market for your work? Write about the dream business you would like to run.

Or, if you don't want to operate your own business but prefer instead to work for a company which gives you a regular salary, then write about your dream job. What kind of work would you like to do, and why?

If you like, you can even write about your very first job or the best or worse job you ever had.

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Tell Me About Something That Makes You Feel Proud

Everyone has something to be proud about. Maybe you're proud of yourself for having been able to make a new life for yourself and your family in a new country despite the great difficulties you faced.

Maybe you're proud of being able to master the English language.

Maybe you're proud of something you accomplished in your studies, such as completing your education.

Maybe you're proud of something you did on your job—your boss called you a hard worker and told

you that you make a valuable contribution.

Maybe you're proud of a talent you have developed, such as creating art or singing or sewing or raising flowers or plants in your home or garden.

Maybe you're proud of earning your independence and being able to take care of yourself and your family.

Maybe you are proud of having been able to overcome terrible problems by working hard to solve them. What were these problems?

Maybe you were able to overcome big obstacles and through hard work and determination accomplish some goal which you weren't sure you could do. What did you accomplish?

Write about the things that make you proud of yourself. It is important to remember these positive things.

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What Does Freedom Mean To You?

What do you do with freedom?

- How does freedom smell? What does it taste like?
- Does freedom have a bad side as well as a good side?
- How does being free make you feel?
- When in your life have you felt you were in a prison?
- When in your life have you felt free?
- Do you feel free now? Or, do you feel tied down?

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Describe A Hardship You Have Experienced

Sometime in our lives, each of us has endured hardships that we overcame. Life is not always easy. Sometimes the difficulties are financial. We often must deal with money problems, particularly if we lose our job and need to find a way to make a living.

Sometimes the hardships we experience have to do with people we love. Some-

times people hurt us or get into trouble. Or, someone we care about may die or leave us when we are still children. Even if we are grown, it is not easy, and we have to learn to live with the loss. This is not easy.

Sometimes hardships can arise from leaving a city or country where you have lived for many years and then moving to a new place and starting a new life. You need to learn to adjust to a new country with unfamiliar people, customs and language.

Sometimes the hardships are emotional. We have to overcome depression or loss of confidence. We may lose hope and need to regain a sense of security.

Try to write about a hardship you have experienced in your life and how you endured or overcame this experience. How did this hardship change you? Did you become stronger or weaker as a result of this hardship? What lesson did you learn that you can share with others?

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Who Is Your Hero?

Each of us has a hero in our life. Maybe it is a loving parent. Maybe it is a teacher who was kind to us and helped us learn how to read and write.

Maybe your hero is a boss who has helped you grow and succeed in your job.

Maybe it is someone who has given you a helping hand in this new country.

Maybe your hero is someone you read about in the newspaper or saw on television. Perhaps someone who did something special with his or her life that helps make the world a little better. Perhaps your hero is a writer, an artist or an athlete.

Or, maybe your hero is a fictional character whom you read about in a novel and you decided you wanted to be like that person.

So, who is your hero? What makes them so special to you? What did they accomplish? Why do you want to be like them? And, do you think that you are a hero to someone, too?

Please write about your hero and why she or he is important to you.

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Tell Me About Your Favorite Hobby

Most people have hobbies that they enjoy. Some people, for example, like to play a musical instrument when they have free time.

Other people like to sing. Some like to read books.

Some people collect coins or have stamp collections. Some love to dance or cook or draw, while others study martial arts and participate in sports.

What is your special hobby? What kind of things do you do in your free time that you feel strongly and passionately about? Write

about your special hobby and what it means to your life. When did you first begin your hobby and what has it taught you?

Or, is there a new hobby that you would like to begin? What is it?

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What If You Could Become A Character In A Movie?

In the movies you find yourself suddenly about to step into the screen to play a part in the film being shown. You can influence the outcome of events and interact with all the characters.

What movie would you like to step into?
What would happen in the movie you "enter"—
how would the movie change?
What would your character be like?

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Write About The Simple Pleasures In Your Life

A newspaper columnist writes about a few of his favorite things guaranteed to lighten his heart or bring a smile to his face. As examples, he writes about seeing a fox walk across a bridge; watching a dog that jerks its hind leg in its sleep—and even "walking into a public restroom and discovering that it is equipped with actual paper towels, not a dryer that weakly blows lukewarm air on your hands." Simple things, yes?

My simple things include:

- Being warmly greeted by my dog when I come home—my dog makes me feel like a bright light has returned to her life and all is right in her world.
- My wife lovingly rubbing my neck when it is so stiff that I can hardly turn my head.
- Sitting down at the kitchen table at night after dinner with a new book in my hands.
- Now, what about you? Write about the simple pleasures in your own life, the ones that make life so rich for you and yet rarely cost any money?

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Let's Write About Hopes And Dreams For The New Year

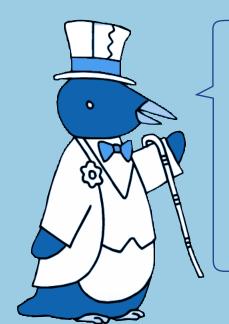
The New Year is always a time of new beginnings, of new possibilities when some of the things we hope for can come true if we work hard and if we have some good luck. We try to put all the bad things that happened in the previous year behind us and instead turn our thoughts and hopes to a brighter future.

As we begin the New Year, let's think about some of the hopes we have for the days ahead. I would like you to write about the hopes and dreams you have for yourself, or for the people you love or for the world you live in.

Make a list.

- What are some of the dreams you would like to see come true?
- How would you like your life to change?
- What prayers do you have for the new year?
- What new things would you like to accomplish in the months ahead?
- How do you want things to change for you, for the people whom you care about, and for the world?

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A Memory About The Beach Or The Ocean

If you have been lucky enough to visit the beach, you probably still have strong memories about this experience. Who can forget the sight of the ocean and its waves? Who can forget the feel of the sand on one's feet, the hot sun beating down, the smell of salt water?

I want you to think back to a time when you were at the ocean—it might be when

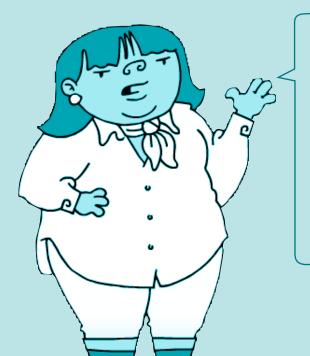
you were very little, or it might be recently when you visited a beach on a vacation.

Close your eyes and try to describe a beach or ocean memory. Try to use some of your five senses in writing your memory:

- Touch what did the beach or ocean feel like?
- Smell what did the beach or ocean smell like?
- Sight describe what you saw and how this made you feel.
- Hear describe the sounds that you heard at the ocean. What, for example, did the ocean sound like?
- Taste what tastes do you remember from your visit to the shore—did you swallow any salt water? Did sand get in your mouth? Do you remember the taste of the foods you ate or the liquids you drank at the beach? Describe them.

Did you have an adventure at the beach or meet someone new or see something strange? Did you discover something in the sand? Was your memory of the ocean or beach a happy one or a sad one? Did you take something home from the seashore? Share with us.

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What Will This Key Open?

We use keys to open many things.

Some keys open doors—such as the door to your home, or the door to your car, or the drawer in your desk where you store special things.

Some keys can open treasure chests filled with all the things which you consider valuable.

Some keys can open your personal

diary where you write about the important things in your life.

Or, maybe you have given someone you love the "key" to your heart or to your soul.

Imagine that someone gave you a key to open something. Write about what the key will open. If the key opens a door, for example, then write about what is on the other side of the door.

If the key opens a treasure box or hope chest, then write about what is hidden inside the box.

Or, you can begin your writing with the following sentence:

She put the key into the lock, turned it and

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Write A Letter To A Child You Love Or Hope To Love One Day

Sometimes in our lives we are lucky enough to receive a letter which we want to keep our entire life. We treasure such letters because of the wonderful things they say to us—they may speak loving and tender thoughts, or they may be filled with wisdom and good advice to help us live better lives. I always tell adults how important it is to write such letters to their children and express all their hopes and dreams for their future and how important their children are to them.

I would like you to write a letter to a child, too. It could be to a young person in your life now, such as a son, daughter, grandchild, nephew, niece or cousin. Or, if you don't have a child, write to one who might be born in the future. Perhaps you might even decide to write a letter to the child you once were. (Think about your receiving the letter that you always wanted but never did receive.).

In your letter, write about your hopes and dreams for your child. What are the things you want for them? What kind of person do you want them to grow up to become? What values do you want them to have? Write about the kind of world you hope your child will live in in the future. In your letter, you can offer advice or wisdom you have learned in your own life which you would like to share with them. Or, write something about your own life which you want the child to know.

Write a beautiful letter that a young person would want to keep all of her or his life. This may be the most important letter you ever write.

(For more ideas on writing letters to children, please read our free on-line book, <u>Laptop Letters: Sending Wise & Loving Messages to Young People in Your Life.</u>)

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Write A Love Story

Each of us has experienced love sometime in our life. We either have been loved by someone or we have loved someone or something. I would like you to write about love. You could write about a certain person whom you love or have loved with all your heart. This might be a spouse, a partner, or a parent, or a child, or a relative or a friend. This can also be a creature, such as your beloved pet. Tell us why you feel such love for them. If you wish, you can even write them a love letter.

You can also write about the kind of person whom you hope to love one day. Describe the person of your dreams. Write a letter to this dream person, if you wish; tell them what caring and loving mean to you.

Or, perhaps your love story is about something that gives you great pleasure. Some people love their work; some people love books or music. Some people love to travel or to play sports. Whatever it is that you love, feel free to write about it. Why do you love this thing so much? Why do you feel so passionate about this?

Or, perhaps someone once told you a love story or tale when you were young that stayed in your mind. What was this love story about? Share it with us.

Or, perhaps you once read a love story, such as Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," but you didn't like the sad ending. How would you change the tale? What new ending would you give it?

Or, think about a story that you once heard, such as "Beauty and the Beast," in which the two characters feel great love for each other at the end of the story. Then, think ahead 25 years. Do they still love each other? Has their love changed? Has their love grown stronger or weaker? What has happened to the love in their life?

You are also welcome to write a love poem, too, about someone you love or wish to love.

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Make A Wish Or Many Wishes

You can write about all the wishes you have in your personal life for yourself, for your friends, for the people you love and care about, your pets. Even wishes for your enemies.

Let your wishes be as wild and crazy and as imaginative as you like anything is possible, such as: I wish I could fly like a bird to the top of the Empire State Building.

We can start each sentence with the words: "I wish..." Then develop the idea of the wish in the rest of the piece.

Your wishes can be serious or they can be serious or whimsical, such as, "I wish I could change the color of my skin each day to go with the color of the clothing I wear when I go to school."

The point is to have fun in writing about wishes. Try to write at least five different wishes if you can. Or, if you want, write only about one wish but do it with several lines. Develop the idea of your wish(es) as best as you can.

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Write About An Early Memory From Your Childhood

We are made of memories; our memories make us special and different from other human beings. Often, we think back to our childhood and remember an experience we had when we were young or a special person we knew or met.

Please consider one of your childhood memories that stays in your mind and share it with us. It can be a happy memory, or a sad one, or a magical memory or an exciting memory. Try to describe in detail what you remember. Write about the type of child you were, what you were like. Write fully about the memory as if you could draw a picture which we could also see with our eyes. Why is this particular memory so important to you? How does it make you feel now?

If you wish, you can write about the earliest memory you can remember. You can start your essay with the words: I remember...

Writers often use their memories to tell us about their lives and their history. You are a writer, too, so tell us about your memory. That way we will get to know you better.

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I Come From...

Each of us has come from some place that has shaped us as human beings.

Let's write a poem or essay that tells where you come from.

Let the first three words of your poem be, "I come from..."

After you say where you are from, try to describe all the important things about where you come from. In your

writing, describe the sights, the sounds, the smells, the feelings of the place you call home. I want to hear what is special about where you come from. What do you remember most about the place you come from. Is it the people, the customs, the lifestyle, the history, the food, the cinema?

- Do you, for example, come from a cold or warm climate?
- Do you come from the city or a rural area?
- Do you come from a small nation or a large nation?
- Do you come from a noisy place or a quiet place?
- Do you come from a poor land or a rich land?
- Do you come from a country with lakes and rivers or with oceans, or mountains and woods?
- In your country, what language is spoken or which language did you speak at home?
- In your country, how do the people dress? What do they look like?
- What foods do you eat?
- What is special about the place you come from? What do you love about your former home? What do you hate or dislike?
- Do you come from a country at peace or a country at war?
- Do you come from a country that is free or one which has a dictator?
- Are people happy in your country? Why?
- Are people sad in your country? Why?
- What are the most important memories you have of the place you come from?
- Who are the people you love or miss? Who are the people who influenced you?
- So begin with the words, "I come from..."

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How Do You Want To Live Your Precious Life?

In her poem, "The Summer Day," Mary Oliver writes about making time to look at all the beauty of the world, even to kneel in the grass to look at insects, or to walk through the fields and enjoy the day without hurrying. Life is so very short—"Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?" she asks (read her poem at: http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/133.html).

And then she ends her poem with two amazing lines to form the question:

"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

So, dear writer, tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? What do want to accomplish in your lifetime? What things do you want to do before you die? What things do you want to see before you leave this life? Which person do you want to love? What do you want to taste before you die? What do you want to achieve? What do you want to experience before your run out of time?

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What Would You Place In Your Worry Box?

Write about a special person in your life. This could be someone you have known for a short time or someone you have known all your life. This person can be someone you love, or even perhaps someone you hate. It might be someone you fear, or someone who is very dear to you.

Tell us who this person is.
What is his or her name?
What is their relationship to you?
Are they a friend or a relative, a boss or a bully you know from school? A lover?

Why is this person special to you? What have they done for you or to you?

What have you learned from this person?
Did they ever speak special words to you?
Did they teach you something special that changed your life?
Tell us a story about them.

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What Was Your First Day In The United States Like?

In the movie "Avalon," a character who immigrated to America remembers what it was like to arrive by ship in Philadelphia from Europe on Independence Day July 4, 1914. He saw lights and fireworks and mistakenly thought they were put there specially for him to welcome him to this country. He remembered feeling so excited and happy.

What about you? Write your own memory of what your own first day or week was like when you arrived in the United States.

Write about the impressions you had. What excited you? What frightened you? What made you laugh? What made you cry?

Were you comfortable or uncomfortable? How was this place very different from the place you had come from, and how was it similar? What was it like to speak or understand English? How did you feel with the language?

What were your hopes and expectations in coming to the United States? Why did you want to come here? Does what you have found here match your hopes and dreams? In what ways? How did people treat you?

Try to write about the feelings you had in those early days in this new country. Try to remember the day or time when you finally began to feel at home here. When was that?

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What Would You Do To Make The World A Little Better?

A writer asks someone, "What is worth worrying about."

The person offers a simple, profound answer: "People doing good things on this earth, leaving the world a better place. It doesn't matter what you do—if you do for cats, fine; if you do for Uganda, fine...," she says. But "everybody owes it to the world to make it a little better."

What about you? What are the things you do or can do to make the world a little better?

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Write What Is In Your Heart

In his poem, "Theme for English B,"
Langston Hughes has an English instructor instruct his students, "Go home and write a page tonight, and let that page come out of you—Then, it will be true." The teacher is asking the students to write honestly to show what they are thinking or feeling. (See: http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/theme-for-english-b/)

Let this be your assignment to bring to class. At home, sit down with paper and pencil and write a page about what is in your heart. Maybe, you will write about something that's on your mind, a problem you have to solve. Maybe you will write about a new experience you just had which you are trying to understand. Maybe, your writing is

about a person you have recently met who has changed your life or had an effect on you. Maybe you will write about what made you happy or sad this particular day. Maybe you will write about a funny moment you experienced, or a joke you heard.

Or, if you prefer, think back to the time before you came to the United States. Discuss what your life was like during the last year in your homeland. Was it a good time? Or was it a hard time for you and your family? Share with me something about your life in your homeland so that I can learn more about you and your country.

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Writing A Subway Or Bus Story

There are many things we can write about from what we see and hear riding on the subways or on buses through the city.

We can write about the people we see. Describe someone you have observed. Make notes in your book about this person. What does he or she look like? How are they dressed? Does that person look happy or sad, rich or poor? What are they thinking? Where do you think that person is going? What is his or her name (make up one). Invent a story about the life of a person you see. Maybe it's a happy story; maybe it's sad.

Or, perhaps you see two people sitting together across from you. Maybe they are friends or lovers or parents. How do they relate to each other? What do you think they feel? What are they talking about? Try to imagine what their lives are like, and write a story about them.

In your description, tell us what time of day it is—morning, afternoon. Do the people look tired or full of energy? What do you think is going on inside their heads—perhaps it is the same as what you are thinking. There are so many subway and bus stories, aren't there?

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What Is Mona Lisa Thinking?

Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of the Mona Lisa is famous for her puzzling smile. (Or, is it a smile?) For centuries people have asked, "Is she smiling or not? Why is she smiling? Why does she seem to look a little different each time one looks at her?" (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona Lisa)

Imagine that you are Mona Lisa. You have come into the studio of the artist, Leonardo da Vinci, to sit for your portrait. You must sit still for a long, long time while Leonardo paints you. Your mind wanders. What are you thinking of as you sit? Write Mona Lisa's interior monologue; write about the thoughts that run through her mind as she sits still.

Or, if you wish, imagine you are the famous artist da Vinci. What are his thoughts as he paints the Mona Lisa? What are the words that go through his mind as he looks at her and tries to capture her image on canvas? What must he think of Mona Lisa?

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Tell Me What Makes You Happy

I want to hear about something or someone who makes you happy.

Maybe it's a person who makes you smile. Maybe it's a song. Maybe it's a celebration. Maybe it's a special food. Or a special place you visit. Or, maybe it's a special book or poem or prayer or belief.

If you prefer, tell me about the happiest day in your life—what happened that day? What made it so special to you?

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An Unforgettable PersonSomeone I Will Always Remember

Tell me about a person you cannot forget, no matter how far away they are from you now.

Maybe it's someone in your family—for example, a grandparent or relative who is wise or loving. Or maybe it's a friend or someone who lives in your neighborhood. Maybe it's someone who makes you laugh or cheers

you up when you are sad. Maybe it's someone who always shows you love and cares deeply about you. Maybe it's someone who is still back in your homeland and you miss him or her so much. Maybe it's someone who once frightened you. Maybe it was a teacher who inspired you.

Why will you always remember this person?

Why is this person so special to you?

What are their special characteristics?

What did he or she teach you?

Describe that person to me—what does he or she look like? What is that person's name?

Did you ever have an adventure together? If so, what was it like?

Share with me a memory about that person—something that he or she said to you or did with you. What makes this person unforgettable to you?

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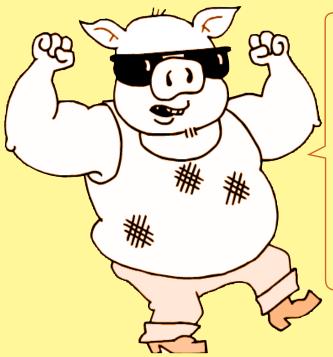
If Someone Gave You A Second Chance, How Would You Change Your Life?

Imagine for a moment that you were one of the miners who had been trapped for many weeks at the bottom of a deep mine in Chile and were finally rescued. While waiting for rescue, you had vowed to yourself that if you ever got out of the mine alive you would change your life for the better.

How would you change your life if you were rescued?

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What Would You Do If You Won The Lottery?

You've struck it rich and won \$144 million in the lottery!

So, tell me, what will you do with the money? It will change your life, making it either better or worse.

Tell me about the selfish things you would do with the money, such as spending it on things you would like.

Tell me about the unselfish things you would do with the money, such as helping others.

One man who won this amount of money divided the money three ways. First an education fund for his children and future generations; second, a trust to cover his family's health care, and third, a philanthropy to help people and organizations in need.

Now it's your turn to use the money. What will you do with it?

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Tell Me About How You Are Challenging Yourself

Tell me about a goal you set for yourself and what you did or are doing to achieve your goal. What is the task you have set for yourself and why did you do this? Why is this goal so important to you? What do you hope to accomplish?

How hard is the task? What progress have you made so far? How much more work do you have to do?

Once you accomplish your goal, how will you feel? How will your life be changed?

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Tell Me About A Time When You Were Brave

Each of us is brave in different ways and in different situations. For example, there is the person who saves another person's life by rescuing someone who falls off the subway platform.

Then there is the person who finds the courage to leave his or her country in order to go to another land and start a new life. That person is very courageous, too, because starting a new life in a strange land and with a different language can be very difficult.

Then there's the person who is very shy, but who leaves the house in the morning to try to find a job and make a living. He somehow does his best to overcome his fear.

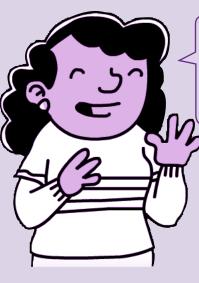
There is the mother or father who works very long hours at a hard job in order to earn money to help support the family. That person is very brave, too.

There is also the person who is afraid of the local bully, but gathers his or her courage to stand up to the bully and tell him off.

So tell me about your own life and a time when you were brave. What was the brave deed or act you did? How did you feel—frightened or confident? Was it hard for you to be brave?

Or, if you wish, write about someone you know who has done a brave deed. Tell me who that person is and what he or she did.

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What Are Your Hopes For Spring?

Yes, spring is coming. You can almost sense it. Something is in the air.

For me spring always brings a sense of hope.

Maybe it's because as a youngster growing up in Brooklyn I would plant seeds in cheese boxes on my sunny windowsill in late winter, right before spring. I loved looking at the seed packets, particularly the ones with marigolds and morning glory flowers on the covers. As I pre-

pared the fresh soil and began planting the seeds, I dreamed of the orange-golden marigolds that would bloom and the blue-purple morning glories that would grow along the fire escape on which I'd place the cheese boxes once it got warmer.

Nowadays, I live near a park and around the beginning of spring look longingly for signs of the early yellow crocuses and daffodils that will start emerging from the ground. I search desperately for the emerging leaf buds on the tree branches. I know that winter is now almost over and everything will soon be better in the world, and I can begin once more to dream of all the good things that the warmer, sunnier weather will bring.

Spring is also the time when I met my wife many years ago, and also when my daughter was born, so it is always a happy time for me.

What about you? What hopes does spring bring to you?

Or, tell me about a spring in your life—maybe it was the year you fell in love, maybe something else good happened to you. Or, maybe it was a very difficult spring filled with rain and tears, but you still remember the time.

Write whatever you wish about spring and what it means to you. If you prefer another season, feel free to write about that time instead.

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Tell Me How You Would Like To Transform Yourself

I remember reading about a person whose face was destroyed in an accident. Doctors and surgeons worked to transform—to change—her face into one that wouldn't frighten her and others, a face that would allow her to be active in the world again and not be ashamed of her appearance.

There are also other kinds of transformations that each of us undergoes. How many times have you said to yourself, "I need to change my life. I want to be a different kind of person."

Or, you may have said, "I want to live a different kind of life." Or, you might have thought, "I want to give up bad habits and bad things and bad people and instead acquire good habits and good things and good friends."

Or, you might have thought to yourself, "I don't want to be afraid any longer. I want to become a more courageous and less frightened person."

So, choose one of the following writing questions:

- How would you want to transform or change yourself?
- Do you know someone who changed or transformed their life into a better life or way of living? If so, write about that person and how they changed.
- Or, if you wish, put yourself in the place of the woman whose face was destroyed and who has been helped by doctors to acquire a new face. Can you write about what she must feel, what she must worry about, how she can find the strength to go on and live her life? Would you have her courage? What are the words she says to herself to keep her going?

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Tell Us Who You Really Are

The poet Emily Dickinson once wrote a poem saying: "I'm nobody! Who are you? Are you nobody, too?" (See the poem at: http://www.poets.org/view-media.php/prmMID/15392)

I think she may have meant that she felt she was not special or famous or even worth knowing. She wrote that she was a "nobody." But, I don't agree with her view. I believe that

each of us is a "somebody." By that I mean each of us is special and distinct in our own way. Each of us is fascinating in our own way. Each of us has a history; each of us has a personality; each of us has accomplishments and hopes and wishes. Each of us has loves and hates; each of us has strong and weak sides. Each of us is distinguished in our own particular way. Who is the "somebody" in you?

Please write about yourself to tell us who you are. Describe the "some-body," the special person you are. First, start with the words, "I am some-body..." and continue writing about yourself.

For example:

I am somebody who was born in...

I am somebody who loves to eat ...

I am somebody who wants to be a ...

I am somebody who dreams of

I am somebody who loves...

I am somebody who lost ...

I am somebody who...

In your essay or poem tell us about your history, or where you come from, or what you hope to accomplish in life. Tell us what your interests are, or what is special about you, or even what you don't like about yourself. You can tell us about your hopes and dreams. Or, tell us about a special skill you have. Share with us the "somebody" you are. We want to know more about you.

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Write About What You Feel Strongly, Passionately About

Each of us has something we love doing with all our heart, with all our passion, with all our soul. Some people call such things a hobby or avocation, some people say this is a calling—something that speaks to their soul or spirit.

Some people delight in collecting the most interesting and beautiful stamps in the world. Some of us have great doll collections; others like to collect tiny figures made of china. Some people have butterfly collections. Others love to collect and read books or listen to music. One person I know owns CDs of all the recorded works of the composer Johann Sebastian Bach. Another acquaintance—someone who is obsessed with politics—has a huge collection of campaign memorabilia. Others feel very passionate about playing soccer or football or cycling and know everything there is to know about their favorite sports teams and players.

What is your special passion? What do you love doing most or thinking about?

In this essay, tell us about something you love dearly. Explain why that interest is so important to you? How does it give you pleasure and bring joy to your life? Share this special part of your life with us.

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What Meaningful Words Would You Want To Write On The Walls Of Your Classroom?

A teacher encourages his students to write their most creative, their deepest thoughts on the walls of his classroom. The students cover the walls with original art, quotes from favorite books, and the things that are in their hearts. Many of the students look to these walls for inspiration in their own lives. The wall, filled with student writings, tells young people that their ideas and thoughts have value and are worth sharing with others.

If you were allowed to, what would you have wanted to write on the walls of your own classroom?

Or, what would you like to write now?

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What Holiday Does Your Family Celebrate?

When you were a child, was there a special holiday your family celebrated? Was it Christmas or Chanukah or Ramadan, Three Kings Day or the New Year? Something else? Do you have a happy memory of something special that happened on one of those days?

What traditions, for example, did you observe?

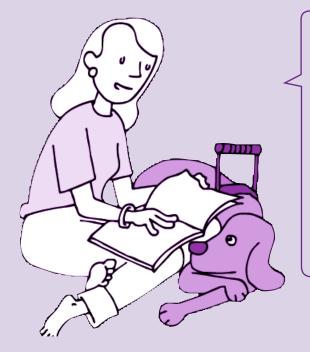
What foods did you cook and eat?

Did you exchange gifts with family and friends?

Do you remember a wonderful gift that someone gave you as a child on this holiday? What was it?

Is there a song or poem you would sing or recite during this holiday? Can you share it with us? What does it mean?

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Describe A Room Created In Your Imagination

You receive a postcard that shows an empty room. Now, fill up this room. Imagine that you once lived in it and tell me a memory about this room. Or, imagine that you stepped into this room and knew it well.

Was this a quiet room or a noisy one?

Was it a living room or a bedroom or a study or a kitchen?

Tell me how it felt to be in this room when the sun came in.

Was it a happy place—did good memories happen in this room? If so, what were the memories?

Was it a sad place—did sad, unhappy memories occur in this room? If so, what was the sad memory?

What kind of people lived in this room?

Were there conversations that went on among the people? What were they like?

Did the people in this room sing songs, or read, or talk? What did the people talk about?

Do you think you could be happy in this room? Why?

Would you like to live in this room? What would it be like?

Would you like to be alone in this room or with some one?

What would you do in this room?

Is this the room of a writer or a painter or a small family? Is this the room of younger or older people? What are they like?

Or, if you prefer write about a favorite or remembered room from your own life. What made it so special? What happened there? You can even make up a memory about this room. Use your rich imagination where anything is possible, anything is true.

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Write About The Most Important Letter In Your Life

Today you received the most important letter of your life—the one that you had been waiting for such a long, long time.

What does the letter say? How does it make you feel? Who sent it to you?

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Write About Your Deepest Wishes

The Japanese have a festival called Tanabata and people celebrate by writing wishes on colorful paper and hanging the wishes on bamboo tree branches.

I love the idea of writing wishes or blessings for people I love. This reminds me of when I visited the Wailing—or Western Wall—in Jerusalem with my wife and placed a written message to God in one of the tiny openings on the wall. I asked God for a child to enter our lives, and, in time my wife and I were blessed with a beautiful, healthy daughter.

What are the wishes or prayers or blessings that you might write on paper and hang from a tree or wall with the hope that they will be answered?

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What Are The Words You Would Use In A Meditation?

At a meditation practice group, the leader asks participants to think with loving kindness and an open heart about the following messages:

May you be safe from harm.
May you be happy.
May you be healthy.
May you feel loved.
May you feel at ease in the world.

Then she asks the group's members to extend these good wishes to themselves, to loved ones, to strangers encountered during the day, and to the wide world.

Now, if you could add to these positive messages, what lines would you write and say?

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What Was The Happiest Day In Your Life?

What made it so special?
Did your life change that day?
If so, in what way?

If you could give someone the happiest day in their life, what kind of day would you give them? What would that day be like for them? Who would you give that day to?

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What Is The Song About Your Life?

Former New York Times columnist Bob Herbert once wrote that we need to pay more attention to the nonmaterial things that "fulfill us, give meaning to our lives, enlarge us, and enable us to more easily embrace those around us." He remembers a character in the August Wilson play "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" who says "everyone has a song inside of him or her, and that you lose sight of that song at your peril. If you get out of touch with your song, forget how to sing it," warns the character, "you're bound to end up frustrated and dissatisfied."

Then, this same character, recalling a time when he was out of touch with his own song, says, "Something wasn't making my heart smooth and easy."

Now is the time to write about the "song" in your own life. Listen. What is your personal song telling you? What is its message? Write about the song within you and share it with others. Sing your song to yourself.

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Write About An Angel In Your Life

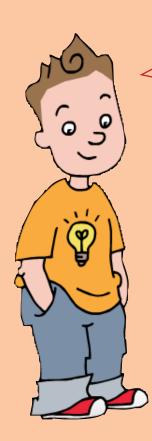
Early in the morning when I walk my dog in the darkened streets, I meet an "angel." He is the man who delivers newspapers to the apartments in my building. He works so hard, and often his shirt and face are drenched with sweat from having to lug the heavy newspapers. But whenever we meet on the street or in the elevator, no matter how tired he is, he greets me with the widest, most beautiful smile. We then may then exchange a few words as he tries his best to communicate in broken English. His being seems to flow with happiness and good will.

I think to myself how hard his life must be, working during the night to make his deliveries, carrying his heavy load, adjusting to life in a new country far from his homeland, and yet he still finds it in him to smile with such good will. When I see him, I feel better; he teaches me how to be a little less self-preoccupied and selfish. How bad can life be, after all, when there are human beings like this man who seems to have an innate sense of goodness?

So what about you? Have you ever met a person who seems to give you hope that things are good in the world and that life can be beautiful. If so, please tell us about this "angel" in your life. Describe why she or he is so special.

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What Would You Say To Someone You Lost But Who Later Returned To You?

You are given the chance to talk to someone whom you have lost and who was once very important in your life. This person may have loved you or done something very special for you. Possibly, he or she even caused you pain and heartache.

What are all the things you would say to that person if you could meet him or her now?

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What Are The Words Of Peace In Your Heart?

I read about a man who takes silent peace walks. His aim is to spread peace by sharing the silence with others. Says the man, Piero Falci, "If we are more peaceful ourselves, we will not be so violent in our relationships, and it will spread. If you cultivate peace, then you can give peace."

Imagine you are taking a silent peace walk. What are the words going on in your head and heart?

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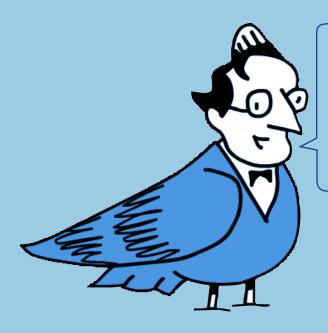
What Are The Opening Lines Of Your Story?

Tony Morrison, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, once said that there was a time in her life when she felt she "had nothing left but my imagination." She began writing fiction, and in desperation one day to complete a piece of writing to take to a writers' workshop, she dashed off "a little story about a black girl who wanted blue eyes." That was the genesis of her first book, "The Bluest Eye." (See

http://www.amazon.com/dp /0307278441/?tag=mh0b20 &hvadid=3523989121&ref= pd_sl_384pgg4d2h_e)

Now, what is the story you dash off in desperation and frustration. Share with us the opening words of your story.

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Rewrite The Life Story Of Someone You Care About

What if we could rewrite the life stories of the people we love?

That is exactly what Nobel Prizewinning writer Doris Lessing did in a book about her parents, "Alfred and Emily." The book has two parts. The first half is a work of fiction about the lives she wished her parents did have, a life filled with

happiness and fulfillment. The second part is the real version in which she explores her parents' unhappy lives.

In essence, Lessing wrote what many of us often think about: What if such and such happened, how would it have change the outcome? Or would it have worked out better if I had done this instead of that? The wonderful thing about being a writer is that you can use your imagination to create different worlds from the one you know. If you're unhappy in real life, for example, you might want to create a world in which you feel happy. If you are poor, you might want to imagine a story in which you are rich.

So, for this writing prompt, you have permission to change a story about your parents, or your friend, or yourself into something entirely different, completely opposite if you wish. You are free to invent the story you want to write, hear and read.

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What If You Could Attend Your Own Funeral And Begin Your Life Again?

A funeral for the living? That's what is happening in Thailand. People are flocking to a Buddhist temple where they seek a fresh new life in which they have left all their cares and worries of the past. As an article in The New York Times described it, "Nine big pink coffins dominate the grand hall of the temple, and every day hundreds of people take their turns climbing into a coffin for a few moments as monks chant a dirge. Then, at a command, the visitors clamber out again cleaned—they believe—of the past."

This takes just a few minutes and a donation, then the people feel reborn. One person who sought luck in business and relief for his aching back and knees said, "If I lie down in the coffin, it will give me a new lease on life."

What do you think about this? Would you want to be reborn, too? How, if at all, would you want to change your life?

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Write Your Personal 'Joy List'

I once read about a man who carried around with him a little notebook which he called a "Joy List." In it he would jot down all the moments that made him smile or laugh. It was his way of cultivating a sense of happiness about being alive and enjoying his life.

He learned to do this from a 13 year-old boy who was dying of lymphoma and who handed him a list of more than 100 memories of the happy moments in his life, like camping or going to Disney World. The boy asked the man to give the list to his parents so that they would remember that their son had fun mo-

ments, too, in his short life. My own aged cousin kept a list of all the good things in life which she would like to see go on forever and ever.

Your turn now: make up your own list of things that give you joy and happiness. Which of those would you like to remain in your life forever? Write some words when something really good happens in your life—from seeing a hummingbird to remembering a funny joke a friend told you.

Start your Joy List now. Write at least two or three things that have given you joy recently. Or, do as my aged cousin did and write a list of all the good things in life which you would like to see go on forever and ever.

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About the Author



In his more than 20 books and work as a newspaper editor, **Bill Zimmerman** has pioneered innovative writing techniques to help people express all the important things within them. His books and web sites are used in literacy and English Language Learning

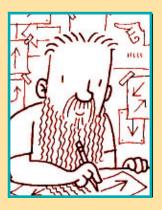
programs around the world and to encourage creative thinking.

His web sites are: http://www.billztreasurechest.com, which features excerpts from all his books, http://www.makebeliefscomix.com, which enables visitors to create their own online comic strips, and http://www.somethingtowriteabout.com, his writing prompts blog for students. Please visit them.

Among his popular books are:

- Pocket Doodles for Kids
- Make Beliefs: A Gift for Your Imagination
- Lunch Box Letters: Writing Notes of Love and Encouragement to Your Children
- How to Tape Instant Oral Biographies

About the Illustrator



Tom Bloom is an artist who has brought joy to the world with his cartoons and illustrations which have appeared in many publications, such as The New York Times, The New Yorker, Fortune and Barron's. He has collaborated with Bill on many other books.

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