

Getting Started on the Place Paper

Purpose: to engage an audience about your place or experience. To “make a map” of the place, but a map with story. These are prewriting steps – your piece won’t necessarily follow in this order.

Sketch a Place within the Place

- Sensory details, its feel, color, sound, smell.



Place II: Make a Scene

- Really draw us into a specific moment. *Scene*—specific moment in time. Sensory details. Shows.
- *Exposition* – tells. Is more abstract and goes for truth.
- *Scene*—I'm standing on a rock on the New River above a class II rapid and someone is talking about how to pick a line through the water and waves, but I can't hear over noise of the river, its power. I can assemble the noise to one location—it's everywhere, all consuming. We make our first turn okay but then . . .
- Exposition—a Class II rapid is based on a system of classification where . . .

Story / History

- Something happened in this place. What? A simple definition of a story is that—something happens.
- What events took place there? Historically? Your own encounters with nature? You're taking the essay into deeper water, changing its direction some.

Nature / Geology

- Biological community? Salamanders? Vultures? Birds? Horseshoe crabs. (Where does research and annotations fit into these steps?). What is interesting or unique about them?
- What natural features are there? What's unique about it?

People

- Add people to your piece. Put in some telling details about them, such as dress or manner. Let us infer their character by something they do, say, wear. Don't describe their whole person at once but let that unfold through dialogue or story.
- Write person's name and a few details. Then skip to another person. And another . . . Write a few things they say after each.

Feeling / Emotion / Idea

- Write about your feelings toward this place? Protective? Ambivalent? Why? Does a purpose begin emerge?
- Go more abstract now than scene. Reflect. Go for big ideas now more than objects. Not gear or things but intangibles.

Past / Present

- Write about your relationship to this place long ago? Compare with now? What's changed? Does a thesis or central idea emerge from that?

Metaphor



Is there a central metaphor? A boxer? Yellow jackets? How can the experience itself be a metaphor, can represent something more than itself? Apply it to other things. What does it teach?

Quotation and Learning

- What other writers are traveling in similar terrain? Quotes to get things going or move them along? To provide context.
- Someone once wrote . . .
- Mary Austin: “It is seldom one finds a buzzard's nest, seldom that grown-ups find a nest of any sort; it is only children to whom these things happen by right.”
- Don't have to cite internally if you acknowledge.

So What?

- Why is any of this important?
- Sharable concern? Maybe you tiptoe back to that story or scene, indicate what it means, reflect on it. No trumpet, no “it’s high time that we” Maybe quieter. Maybe just ask questions? Not polemical . . . no call to arms, no guilt about how wasteful we are, even though we are, but you do want to convince us of something.

Counter Narrative

- While the place or experience is often seen as X, it's really Y.
- Education is often about grades, data, but real learning . . .

Voice / Language

- Use your own. Be you. Get into it.
- Unpack words. Nostalgia.
- Unexpected adjectives or words. Sleeping river. Slate clouds.

Titles

- A play on words in some way? A memorable phrase? After the Flood.

Structure.

- Let it flow like a river, with fast currents and then still parts, eddies, asides, back to moving water. Skip space if we're in a new section. Add dialogue. Make one line indented if that line is important and needs to stand alone, aside from a paragraph.

Beginnings.

- Try another. A memorable thing someone said.
- A new scene. Use that scene to flashback.

Beginnings II

- Try again. A new point of entry . . .

