

## TWO WRITING PROMPTS

PROVIDED BY KATY YOCOM

*Author of Three Ways to Disappear*

WWW Membership Meeting April 7, 2020

### CREATING CHARACTER—AND MAYBE CONFLICT, WHILE YOU'RE AT IT

Think of a time in your life, or in your character's life, when there was a sense of wonder, awe, mystery—something beyond your understanding, that has stuck with you because you can't explain it to yourself or resolve it. Where the world seemed to not quite operate the way you expected it to. Maybe it's an encounter with an animal, or with a stranger, that seemed somehow magical.

1. Write about that thing. The thing you can't explain or can't make sense of. Five minutes.
2. Now, write about how you do make sense of it. How you explain it to yourself. Five minutes.
3. Now write about the thing that mystifies you, but from the point of view of someone who holds an opposing view, or at least a different view. Do your best to really enter this different perspective. Don't just be oppositional and reductive. For these five minutes, embrace this other take. Try to understand it. Five minutes.

Any discoveries when you turned it around?

We are meaning-making machines. We can't help it. Those stories you wrestle with—those are themes for you. They're rich territory.

What you've just done is develop two opposing fundamental worldviews. You've begun to develop your characters—who they are, what they believe, how they see the world—and you've created a believable conflict can that help drive your story.

### A PROMPT FOR WRITING ABOUT PLACE

This prompt is adapted from Writing Companion, prompt 15: Senses of Place.

<https://writingcompanion.wordpress.com/2008/12/12/writing-prompt-describe-place/>

For this prompt, your challenge is to describe a place and then go further, describing the place in a way that conveys **the meaning that the place holds for you**. The purpose of this exercise is to write more evocative descriptions—and, again, to characterize yourself/your character by the way she experiences a place.

Don't set the bar too high, trying to describe *a special place*. The emotions that special places arouse can be difficult to distill on the page. Instead, select a location from your daily life—your kitchen, a favorite cafe, a yoga studio or gym, the local library or cinema, a favorite walk or lookout, a place you try to avoid.

If your selected location is large, focus in. Rather than trying to describe your whole garden, perhaps focus on one corner. If you choose a 3-day music festival, your subject is so big that you can use only big brushstrokes to describe. What about focusing on one venue, music act, or food stall?

Once you have chosen a location, do the following:

**1. Visit the location.**

Jot down a few notes about what you'd like to include in your description. If you cannot visit the location, still take notes about what memories about the place you want to incorporate.

**2. Link your description to the senses.**

Work with your notes and start to add depth to your material. E.g., “an Oriental rug” may become a “soft, rich-red Oriental rug, thread-bare where the dining chairs had sat.” The word “TV” may turn into “ancient TV set punctually blaring out the evening news.” Incorporate all five senses.

Make it easy for readers to see, hear, feel/touch, taste, smell your chosen place. What about temperature, changes in light, the sense of time passing?

**3. Highlight one emotion.**

Now try rewriting your place description to incorporate a dominant emotion. Let the emotion color the way you describe the place. A dominant emotion shapes the writer's choice of language, images, and sensory details.

Two people may describe a cemetery, but the two descriptions will be quite different if one person works with the idea of “fear” and the other with “lost love.”

**4. Use a telling activity.**

It's a common mistake for descriptions to be static and therefore lifeless—devoid of action, motion, people, activity, a sense of time passing. To help establish the essence of the location, you could try including an activity that helps you tell more about the place.

Describe a wine shop as you browse for a bottle of champagne (or bourbon – or other beverage) to mark a specific celebratory occasion about which you are full of anticipation. Then, describe it as you hurriedly look for an inexpensive red to take to your friend's place.

Are you describing an empty yoga studio? Or are you there, participating in a challenging class?

If you are there, in action, how does what you are doing affect your mood and your description? Specifically, how does the action affect what you notice?

You can also put someone else in your scene, instead of yourself or in addition to yourself.