

## The Stories You Carry – Summer Journal Writing

Good writing can be taught, and everyone's writing can be improved. But what many folks struggle with initially is coming up with creative ideas for their stories.

For your summer writing assignment, you'll be responding to all the following writing prompts. (FYI, It's a good idea to have a journal for brainstorming and freewriting. Once your ideas begin to find direction, *then* turn to your computer for crafting your draft.)

Save your work electronically as ONE document, give your work a file name, and upload it to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) by August 9<sup>th</sup>. (I'll give you the turnitin.com class ID and password when we return in August). A print copy will also be due in class on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

The writing topics are as follows:

- Horse Latitudes
- Scar Stories
- Reflections on a Name

Detailed descriptions for each follow, but remember that these are narratives --- stories, so your pieces should follow the traditional plot structure. Don't forget that we will be sharing our writing in class, so your stories must be revised and edited for an audience. Your first draft is not your only draft.

*(I know you're going to ask me "How long does it have to be?". Answer: Long enough to cover the subject and short enough to keep it interesting).*

Questions? Concerns? Email me at [diana.bishop@cobbk12.org](mailto:diana.bishop@cobbk12.org)

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### Horse Latitudes

The Horse Latitudes. A large area in the Atlantic Ocean with a curious name.

The story goes like this: centuries ago, in the days of sailing ships, captains told of a large space on the map that was best avoided. Here the winds might suddenly die down for weeks on end, the sails going slack, the currents ceasing, and the sea growing flat and listless. Here ships would move no further. Under a merciless sun, the sailors would pray, days on end, for a breath of wind, a breeze to flutter the sails. Meanwhile, the fresh water on board slowly dwindled away....

When things became desperate, any horses they'd brought along were thrown overboard first, to conserve water. And the waiting continued.

Horse Latitudes. A place to be avoided, but for many sailors, an inevitable part of the job and a hazard of the journey. We can imagine their fear when the breeze began to lessen, their growing anxiety when the clouds disappeared from the sky, their worry when the ship became still. The feeling of powerlessness.

We have Horse Latitudes in our lives: ruts we fall into, obstacles that are difficult to overcome. We wait for help, for the breeze to come again, praying. Maybe we become listless, energy gone, uninspired, our faith lost. These times may come regularly or rarely, but come they inevitably do.

*Respond in writing:*

Explore the Horse Latitudes in your own life. How do you know when they are approaching? What situations tend to lead you into these difficult areas? What typical forms do they take? Chart your emotional and mental state in this zone.

Then, think about what works in getting the ship moving again? What do you need to throw overboard if anything? What sacrifices are made? How do you prepare for these troubles? What do you call forth the fresh breeze once more?

Begin shaping an exploration of your Horse Latitudes into a piece of public writing. You want to communicate what the experience is for you, writing small, writing real. This can take any form, any shape.

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## Scar Stories

From *Writing and Being*:

Scar stories seem to come easily for us—from childhood to old age, people like to tell stories about their wounds, their operations, their accidents. And Nietzsche tells us that we must “come to love our scars.” This Exploration involves looking at your physical scars, your literal wounds, and telling stories that come with them and need to be told. (115)

*In your journal...*

Take some time to think about your body—this physical self you have come so far with through life—and the many wounds and injuries it has received. Then, in your journal (or on another sheet of paper, if you like) draw an outline-sketch of your body. You don’t need to worry about artistic accuracy...just give a sense of limbs, a head, a torso, etc.

On your drawing, mark some of the physical wounds and scars you have thus far acquired in your life. As you do this, begin thinking and remembering about the circumstances of each scar: how it happened, how you felt at the time, what you did, how it healed, what it reminds you of. Tell the small stories of these scars as they appear on your body. Some may be large—but other might be small but still vivid for you. Each is unique, with its own history, often hidden (and maybe even forgotten) until you find it again and turn your writer’s eye toward it.

*Public writing...*

Pick one of your emerging scar stories, one that needs to be told, and begin working it into a piece of public writing. Perhaps the wounding itself will want to be the center, the heart of the story, and the drama will unfold around it. Or the wound may serve to illuminate a relationship or help you to see something or someone else more clearly. Just start telling the story and see where it takes you. Be sure to *show* the event, not just *tell* it. Work for a sense of having a specific effect on your reader or listener.

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**Reflections on A Name**

AGENT SMITH: “Do you hear that, Mr. Anderson? That is the sound of inevitability. That is the sound of your death. Goodbye, Mr. Anderson.”

NEO: “My name...is *Neo!*”  
--*The Matrix*

This writing focuses on our names—our surnames, first names, middle names, nicknames, wished names, other names, whatever. Writing in your journal about your name can be springboard to many things, into the many levels of who you are, into stories and memories and questions.

So, write freely in your journal in relation to your names, letting thoughts and images lead the way. Follow where your words lead you. Take the time to consider what names mean, what they represent. See what happens. See what you learn.

*Public Writing...*

And then, start moving some things out into public writing, shaping them into something to share with us.

Some suggestions:

- As always, give your piece a title (name your creation). But wait until you are finished before you title it—because you don’t know what it will be.
- Put in some facts that “tell”—but also “show” us things.
- Wonder about your name as symbol, as sound. How do your names *feel* to you? What images do they evoke?
- Think about your parents, your ancestors, the generations who came before you. What of them might be in your name?
- As always, take your time with this. Don’t try to write the finished piece the first time. Just write, and then write some more. And then go away for awhile. Come back and read it aloud and delete and add and change and reconsider. Do this as many times as you can, as you need, until it starts to find its form, its meaning.
- There are many possible forms and possible voices for this writing. Be patient and keep working with this until it is what it needs to be.

Excellent		Good		Fair		Unsatisfactory	
5	<b>Organization</b> unfolds a carefully-organized narrative, in a sequence that moves the reader smoothly through the text; ideas, sentences, and paragraphs are tied together.	4	<b>Organization</b> shows a well-planned narrative strategy; story is easy to follow; ideas are evenly tied together; events and details fit where they are placed.	3	<b>Organization</b> may not craft a complete story structure, or may have trouble tying ideas together; reader may be confused by poorly-placed events or details.	2	<b>Organization</b> writing is extremely hard to follow; story sequence, if any, is disorganized or incomplete; ideas and details are not tied together.
5	<b>Voice</b> conveys a reflective personal message that speaks directly to the reader; is deeply involved with the topic; shares a range of feelings.	4	<b>Voice</b> makes a strong effort to share and original personal message; connects with the purpose and audience; attempts to explore a range of feelings.	3	<b>Voice</b> tells a story, but in a predictable way; gets the basic message across, but does not seem very involved with the topic of the audience.	2	<b>Voice</b> is not involved in sharing an experience with a reader; does not focus on anything of personal importance or interest; writing is flat and lifeless.
5	<b>Word Choice</b> uses both original and everyday language in a natural way; uses sophisticated vocabulary that creates a striking picture and brings the story to life.	4	<b>Word Choice</b> uses words that fit the story and create an accurate picture of a place; experiments with some new words.	3	<b>Word Choice</b> may not use words that convey strong feelings or images; some words are overused or may not fit the story purpose.	2	<b>Word Choice</b> has a hard time finding the right words; may use words that do not fit the topic; some vocabulary detracts from the meaning of the text.
5	<b>Sentence Fluency</b> well-crafted simple and complex sentences flow in a smooth rhythm ; dialogue, if used, sounds natural and strengthens the story; sentence lengths and patterns vary.	4	<b>Sentence Fluency</b> crafts easy-to-follow sentences; may effectively use fragments and/or dialogue to enhance the story.	3	<b>Sentence Fluency</b> simple sentences work, but may have trouble with more complicated structures; sentences are understandable, but may be choppy, rambling or awkward.	2	<b>Sentence Fluency</b> sentences are incomplete, rambling, or confusing; may have trouble understanding how words and sentences fit together.
5	<b>Conventions</b> is skilled in most writing conventions; correctly uses subjects, predicates, and sentence combining; proper use of the rules of English enhances clarity and narrative styles.	4	<b>Conventions</b> spelling, capitalization, punctuation and usage are mostly correct; minor errors don't interfere with following the story; some editing may be needed.	3	<b>Conventions</b> makes frequent, noticeable mistakes, which interfere with a smooth reading of the story; extensive editing is needed.	2	<b>Conventions</b> makes repeated errors in spelling, word choice, punctuation and usage; sentence structures may be confused; few connections made between ideas.

Horse Latitudes: \_\_\_\_\_/25

Scar Stories: \_\_\_\_\_/25

Reflections on a Name: \_\_\_\_\_/25

**TOTAL:** \_\_\_\_\_/75