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SPARKS

Personal Narratives with Mariama Lockington

by Mariama Lockington, novelist and poet

GRADES 7–12

TYPE

MEMOIR
NARRATIVE

Students revisit powerful memories to generate personal stories filled with heart.

WHAT YOU WILL DO

This exercise from poet, novelist, and educator Mariama Lockington asks students to revisit powerful memories through writing. The prompts were first introduced by Mariama as part of 826NYC's quaranTEEN voices program, which connects teens and professional authors around the country. Learn more about quaranTEEN voices here.

From Mariama:

Writing personal narrative or memoir can be a powerful way to excavate truth and build connection. It requires, however, that you face the page with courage and vulnerability, that you be willing to dig back through your memories—good and bad—and share your heart and life story with others. When most people think of a memoir or personal narrative, they often think of a book that's written in prose, but personal narratives can take many forms: poems, graphic novels, or traditional prose. A wise teacher of mine once said: Let your story take whatever form it needs. Keeping this in mind, use the following prompts to create a personal narrative of your own—in whatever form is most inspiring to you.

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Prompt 1:

Identify an object that brings you joy. For example, maybe it is a bike, favorite book or special blanket, etc. Now, think of a memory you have that includes this object and write/draw a snapshot of this memory, using as many details as you can.

- What is your object?
- How does your object provide adventure, bring your joy, or keep you safe?
- What do you remember seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling when you first came into contact with this object?
- Why is this object important to you?
- Do you still have the object?
- If you don't still have it, what happened to it?
- If this object could speak to you, what would it say
- What do you want to say to your object?

Prompt 2:

Painting a picture of the environment and landscape can be a really powerful way to start to tell a story about yourself. For example, in the graphic novel Hey, Kiddo, the memoir begins with a journey to a cemetery to visit a family grave. What places in your life hold significance?

Think about a time you embarked on some kind of journey: a road trip, a walk in the park, a train ride to a part of the city you'd never been to, a sleepover at a friends house, a visit to a museum, etc. Start your narrative by describing the physical landscape and identifying markers you remember, and then think about what sounds, smells, and feelings this journey brings up for you.

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