

*You Already Have What You Need: Unlocking Memories through Sketching, Writing, and Reading. (Learned in a workshop given by the poet Patricia Smith).*

In this one-hour workshop, students sketch a bird's-eye view of a neighborhood, either the first one they remember or the one that stands out most in their minds. This is a rough sketch, not an art project—no artistic talent required! After several minutes of sketching, we'll each share briefly about our sketches. From there, we'll use writing prompts to unlock more ideas, and then write without stopping for several minutes. Once we've generated this raw material, we will read "Child on Top of a Greenhouse," by Theodore Roethke, an example of a poem that tells a story in very few words. Students then shape what they've written into a poem or story. We'll close with reading these pieces aloud.

Objectives:

1. Learner will sketch a map of a neighborhood they have lived in, either the earliest neighborhood they remember or the one that stands out most in their minds.
2. Learner will look at a list of prompts and do a timed free write on one of the prompts that brings them a strong memory.
3. Learner will read the poem, "Child on Top of a Greenhouse," by Theodore Roethke.

Materials:

- List of Prompts (copies for each student)
- "Child on Top of a Green House" by Theodore Roethke (to display on screen, chart paper or white board)

Procedure:

Encourage students to think of their earliest neighborhood, or the one that stands out most in their minds. Have them close their eyes and picture the building where they lived, some of the neighbors, the street, any special places in the neighborhood, and so on. Tell students to make a rough sketch of a bird's eye view of this neighborhood. Emphasize that this is not an art project, but a very rough sketch with stick figures and other basic drawings of buildings, etc. Once the maps are complete (seven to eight minutes), the teacher talks about his neighborhood map and tell a brief story or two of something that happened in a specific location on his map. Students share briefly about their maps and then read the list of prompts and underline two or three that stand out. They choose one of these and write on that topic without stopping for at eight to nine minutes.

They have now generated the raw material for a poem. The teacher reads aloud the poem "Child on Top of a Greenhouse," by Theodore Roethke, displaying the poem on the board. Point out specific images in the poem, talk about how few words are needed to tell a whole story. Students now shape their free write into a poem. They may use a similar structure to Roethke's, or they may come up with an entirely different structure. The only guideline is to carve something more specific out of the raw material to prepare it for an audience.

*Child on Top of a Greenhouse*  
by Theodore Roethke

The wind billowing out the seat of my britches,  
My feet crackling splinters of glass and dried putty,  
The half-grown chrysanthemums staring up like accusers,  
Up through the streaked glass, flashing with sunlight,  
A few white clouds all rushing eastward,  
A line of elms plunging and tossing like horses,  
And everyone, everyone pointing up and shouting!

*Prompts for Neighborhood Sketch*

Something tragic  
A neighborhood character  
Something you regret  
You couldn't stop crying  
Most important street  
Neighborhood gathering place  
Something you lost  
Something you found  
Someone you found  
You couldn't stop laughing  
The highest height you remember  
Prevalent sound  
Prevalent smell  
Something involving numbers  
You lied  
Something that happened in the bathroom  
You were lied to  
A trip you remember  
Something involving fire  
Strangest thing you ever swallowed  
A betrayal  
A physical hurt  
An emotional hurt  
You said something stupid  
Wished you could turn back time  
A holiday  
Wished you could stop time  
You wanted to be bigger or older  
You wanted to be smaller or younger  
Strangest thing you ever touched  
Something that turned your stomach  
Something you wish you hadn't seen  
You taught someone something