

Once they are seated with the chosen objects, the students will need only writing tools. If time permits, allow students a few moments to contemplate their items. Now, they're ready to write. As they do, encourage them to hold on to the objects—the tactile closeness aids association. Some students readily don the belongings. When students are ready to write, give them the following guidelines, pausing after each to let them write.

1. Examine your object as if you were a detective. Look at its every detail objectively. Use specific sensory details to describe it accurately and thoroughly. Be as complete as you would need to be if you were presenting the object as evidence in a case.
2. You are the curator of a museum. As such, you have been assigned to create the exhibit card to accompany this object in a display. Assume that you have complete knowledge of the origin and history of this object. Write the exhibit card, highlighting important or interesting moments in the object's history.
3. Now, become the item's owner, or its most important owner if it has had more than one. Or you may be the person who created it, if you'd rather. Consider how you felt about this thing: Why did you value it? In what way did it affect your life? Imagine the most important day in its time with you. Write a journal entry for that day.
4. Quickly imagine and record answers to these: Where did you acquire this item? Where did you keep it? What else was nearby? What are its secrets? Its powers?
5. Reread what you've written. Focus on the phrases or lines which most intrigue you. Use them as a starting point to draft a poem.

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Growing Stomachs

It's a familiar idea that writing tasks that are relevant to students' real lives can bring out expressive skills that even students themselves may not know they have—and what could be more relevant to real life than eating? In this activity, students practice and refine their use of strong verbs, sensory descriptions, and concise language by writing menu items.

I begin by reading several items from the menus of some popular local restaurants. Then I give students copies of one or two of the menus, or project transparencies I've made of one or two of them, and we discuss briefly (1) what makes the menu item "work"; and (2) how it is structured (i.e., not a sentence, normally). I explain that class members will write menu items intended to make stomachs growl and mouths water.

Next I tape ten or fifteen laminated food pictures (from *Gourmet*, *Southern Living*, or cookbooks with color photos) to the wall or chalkboard, and number them. Students (either working alone or with a partner) then circulate and select three dishes to write up as menu items: one main dish, one dessert, and one other item (salad, hors d'oeuvres, etc.). They name each of their dishes (as in "Scallops Diablo") and describe them menu-fashion in ten or twenty additional words.

Students can usually finish at least one item in ten minutes. The teacher can either write along with the students or circulate to hear students' ideas on their writing.

Then two or three volunteers each read one of their menu items to inspire further efforts from their classmates. Students continue writing, finishing all three.

We spend the final ten minutes of the class reading and sharing our items, and students comment about which menu items were especially effective, which dishes would be good for a fancy night out with someone special, and whatever else interests them.

Hint: Although this activity works anytime, it's all but overwhelming right before lunch. Bon appétit!

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Stories in the News

Many times the creativity that we know is in all students seems to be "blocked" when they try to write. Here's an idea that will provide just enough of a stimulus to set that creativity free.

After your students have used newspapers for reading activities, and before you take them to the recycling bin, have students find a couple of interesting articles that intrigue them. After you have encouraged them to understand the who, what, where, and when of the situations described in the articles, try to get students to imagine what the main characters in