Power of the Pen: Identities and Social Issues in Fiction and Nonfiction

CLASS THREE • Assignment

Write a fictional piece (this can be a short story or a part of something larger) or a memoir piece (this can be a complete essay or a part of something larger) about an experience of literal or figurative travel or transformation.

In your piece, create a sense of movement from and to.

Your piece could be about literal travel. For example, going from a familiar geographical place to an unfamiliar geographical place.

Or your piece could be about psychological transformation. For example, moving from a place of uncertainty or lack of knowledge to a place of strong belief, sureness, or understanding. Or for example, moving from a feeling of community, belonging, safety to a feeling of alienation, isolation, and otherness.

Or your piece could be about both literal travel and psychological change. And you may find that it really is about both. You may find that a transformation to your life or your character's life - such as a move to a new city or country or house, a new job, a new school, a marriage, a divorce, a political event, a war, an election, a birth, a death - brings on an internal transformation.

If you want to write about both external and internal change, you are welcome to, but if you want to focus only on external or internal change, you are welcome to do that. See where this assignment takes you.

As you begin to write, think about how you should organize this fictional piece or this memoir piece. We will look at structure again next week, and you'll have plenty of time during weeks 3 and 4 to talk about structure with your instructors, so don't worry if you don't feel like you know how to structure this piece perfectly. As you write, you will probably make discoveries about how you want to tell this story.

But try to think about the order of events. For example, you could think of this as a two-part piece: there is the part before the change or transformation, and there is the part after it. Which part should you start with? Should you start by giving the reader the "before" and then move to the "after," or should you start with the "after" and then show the "before"? Should you go back and forth between the two parts?

And try to think about point of view and memory. Since your piece will be about a change or transformation, the way you tell the "before" might be different from the way you tell the "after." If the "before" takes place in childhood, and the "after" takes place in adulthood, will you try to write the "before" part from a child's perspective, or will you write it as an adult, looking back?

There are no bad decisions here, so again, don't worry. You'll have plenty of time to talk about point of view and memory with your instructors. Just notice your decisions, and think about the effect that your decisions create. And then after you have finished your assignment, take your observations and questions to your instructors' week 3 class discussions. We look forward to hearing your thoughts!

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Suggested word range: 1500-3000 words.