

Creative Writing
Mr. Monsen
Creative Nonfiction Piece

Directions: Follow steps 1-4 below to complete the assignment. All work should be done in your notebook first and then typed.

The goal of a Creative Nonfiction piece is to make nonfiction stories read like fiction so that your readers are as enthralled by fact as they are by fantasy.

Step 1: Brainstorm by writing about five of the topics below for ten minutes.

Unmask Your Soul:

Halloween costumes reveal much about who we are underneath our contrived, ordinary selves. Think back to your childhood and relive your favorite Halloween costume—why you chose it, what it divulged about you, and how it felt putting on the costume. Something mysterious and compelling happens when we try to be something or someone else. Explore that experience.

Clothes Lines:

Everyone has a favorite article of clothing—an inherited wedding dress, a flannel shirt borrowed from an old friend, a warm pair of socks received on Father’s Day. Find an article of clothing that you can’t throw away because of an emotional connection. Describe why this piece of clothing means so much to you, and use it as a source to explore people, time, and how simple objects can possess so much meaning.

Scar Tissue:

We all have scars. Though most do not conjure welcome memories, scars are an important part of our lives – both physically and metaphorically. Scars reveal our vulnerability and human frailty, but also represent our resilience and toughness. Write about a scar you have, how you got it, and what it means to you.

The Things You Carry:

Make a list of physical objects you carry with you: a wallet and a phone, a journal and a pen, medications and mementos. Then make a list of non-objects you carry: memories, ideas, dreams, scars (literal or figurative), the people or places of your past. Once you’ve created both lists, write an essay that incorporates and investigates the items on each. Why do you carry these things? What do they mean to you? Do the physical items relate to the mental ones? Use “These things I carry” as your opening line.

Love Letter:

Write a love letter to an inanimate object that explores why you appreciate what you’re writing about, what its special qualities are. Title it as you would address the letter: Dear Jeep, Dear Pizza, Dear Cellular Device, etc.

If I Hadn’t:

Think about a choice you made in your life that led to a specific consequence or outcomes. Explore the alternate reality that could have been if you’d made a different choice in an essay that begins *If I hadn’t...*

Describe a significant place:

Allow the details to reveal why the place matters. Describe it from a tree or a rooftop or from a hawk’s point of view. Describe it from the height of a dog or a turtle.

Recall a photograph:

Describe the photograph in a way that suggests (but doesn't specifically name) why it matters (remember the creative writer's adage, "show, don't tell"). Describe what happened either just before or just after the photo was taken. Please, feel free to use your phones for this assignment...

Describing a room:

Describe a room that is important to you and explain why. For example, your bedroom is your sanctuary and that's where your world transforms into your best reality.

Step 2: Read the two sample pieces below and answer the "Question To Think About" for each piece?

Creative Writing Sample #1

Farewell, Old Friend

Ever since I first drew breath, it was a part of the family. When I was brought home, when I was nothing but a cooing little baby, it was there, silently admiring my greatness (yes, it was obvious even then that I would achieve great things when I grew up, but that is a story for another day). As I grew older, each passing year bringing new discoveries, experiences, and shoes, it remained very much the same, a stalwart companion in this ever-turning kaleidoscope we call "life".

While it never uttered a sound, I could tell we had a special bond from the moment my brain had developed enough to allow me to think rational thoughts. It stood with a silent pride, looming over me for much of my life, a gentle giant, intimidating and fierce, at the same time calm and welcoming, like one of those tigers that imprints on a human who raised it and decides not to maul said human after years spent apart.

Despite being unable to communicate (At least, that's what they told me; I thought we had some pretty engaging conversations. It was a real class act, much like myself.), it would always open up to me, to everyone. It was candid to a *fault*—it kept almost no secrets from anybody, and even the secrets it kept could eventually be dredged up from its depths, if one was dogged enough (To be fair, you probably didn't want to find those secrets; they were rancid by the time anyone found them). It was this transparency that made it seem unsuited for a role as a confidant, but its trustworthiness surpassed its honesty, if only by a narrow margin.

Then, time reared its ugly, ancient, gnarled head.

Time.

The turbulent ocean that batters the ramparts of your soul until it breaks through.

The dark clouds spreading their tendrils across the sky as you approach your twilight.

The skeleton in the midnight cloak that moves at a snail's pace yet will always catch you.

The waistband of the jeans you wore in college that tightens around your waist, and instead of just chalking it up to getting older and parting with \$20 to get new pants, you tell yourself it's your fault, you decide to lose the weight, and you proceed to buy a gym membership you'll use once before you give up and take a few days off from work to mope around and eat Cheetos and ice cream while watching awful TV with the blinds shut so no one will see you.

You know, *that* time.

Time corrupted my friend, as it does us all. It wasn't its usual self; it needed more and more energy just to get through the day, and it had trouble keeping its cool. My mother saw this, and she decided it was time my friend shuffled off this mortal coil.

I wasn't even there to see it.

I return home one day to find my friend gone, already replaced with a newer, shinier model. It stood there, stouter than my friend had been (these things never knew when to lay off the food), but just as taciturn as its predecessor...it must have known how difficult this change was for not just me, but my whole family (They never showed any indication that this bothered them, but I could tell they were hurting. On the *inside*.).

I paced back and forth, sizing it up. Its coat glimmered slightly in the light passing through my skylight: jet black, with a gleaming silver front. This new household fixture remained motionless... a hopeful sort of motionlessness. My mind was at odds with itself. Part of it wanted my old friend back, nothing had been wrong with it, we had been overreacting, asking too much of it. The other part wanted to give this new blood a chance, this is what life's all about, out with the old, in with the new, we might be surprised, what did we have to lose?

Eventually, I just opened it up, grabbed an 8-pack of Juicy Juice, and proceeded to drown my worries in fruit punch, as I am wont to do (Get off your soap box, I don't have a problem). As I knocked 'em back (they burn so good), I reminisced on all the fond memories I had of my old friend, and I realized this was an opportunity to make some more.

Sometimes I wonder what happened to my old friend after it left. It's probably dead in a garbage dump somewhere.

Question To Think About: What is this piece about?

Creative Writing Sample #2

Caught In Traffic

Stuck in traffic. Isn't that always the case? Out of all of the places to be stuck, I guess I'm lucky. I mean, the George Washington bridge is a lot classier than a highway in the middle of nowhere. Manhattan is on the horizon, opportunity is within reach, and I have a front row seat. Although, the fog does make it a bit hard to see those jewels in the distance. Whatever. I'm not complaining. I have no right to.

The fog makes the whole thing sort of dreamlike. If I ignore the beeping and honking of car horns, it's beautiful. Ahead of me, the side rails of the bridge fade into the sky. The fog masks them, and makes it feel as if the bridge is materializing in front of me with each rotation of my car's tires. The lights on the rails remain visible for a little longer after the steel of the bridge has faded away. As if bridges aren't already breathtaking. As if *this* bridge isn't already breathtaking.

It is an iron giant in the simplest sense. Well, I guess steel is more accurate. Tremendous, imposing, and yet passive. Each piece of steel melds into the other. It supports. For 82 years it has supported the migration of people. Every kind of person. Every tourist that has longed to see Manhattan. Every person making their way into the city. Out of the city. Upstate. Across the country.

Millions upon millions of people. Families, wives, lovers, strangers, criminals. It has seen more of human nature than any one person can fathom. It has sat silently. It still sits silently. Yet, I have the feeling that it has said plenty. I know that it will say plenty more.

It is built to last. The sloping, gentle rails are a facade. Heavy. Strong. It prides itself on its strength. Metal trusses comprise the bridge, and allow it to stand tall. It's almost symbolic. A bridge of enormous brute strength that is made up of smaller, individual pieces. Altogether, it forms something to be admired, feared, and respected. Almost like the United States. It's no wonder why it's named after our first president. The architect of our values.

It will long outlive me; I am sure. It was built to. Years and years from now, a high-tech and unfamiliar New York City will shine in the distance. Maybe spaceships will hover over the black tar. The tire marks from centuries before will be faded or paved over. A new coat of paint will cover the rust that has formed on its steel bones. Neon, maybe. People will continue to marvel at its beauty. Its stature. Its silhouette will still be seen as the ancient Sun sets yet again. It will still stand the way it did 82 years ago. The way it does today.

How many people have died because of this bridge? The immigrant workers that needed money to afford the American Dream. The ones that fell to their deaths to construct a metal masterpiece. Those who have sought solace in it by jumping to their graves. I do not condone suicide. Given the choice of where to end an existence, however, it does seem suitable to pick a bridge. A symbol of force. Power. Offsetting a simple life with enormity. Contrasting mortality and immortality. It seems to be the most figurative way to go. Tragic, too.

I hope that the people in the cars around me notice it as well. Surely they can overcome the annoyance of traffic. They have to. But then again, the bridge's beauty isn't blunt. It's more of a refined elegance. The kind that does not call for attention, but yearns for it. I can't expect everybody to see visions of the future and past because of a bridge. Not everybody. Still, there has to be *someone*. Too often people are caught in the rat race. So consumed by the finite that they miss the infinite. They, quite literally, drive by the wonders of the world. No wonder people are so unsatisfied. If they pass by every bridge, then what's the point? Bridges lead to roads, roads lead to cities, cities lead to opportunity, opportunity leads to accomplishment, and accomplishment leads to happiness. If you start driving past bridges, then pretty soon you're driving past happiness. It's simple, and yet so many people just drive over bridges like they're nothing.

I know that millions of people will continue to drive and occupy themselves with the trivial things in life rather than stopping to consider a bridge. Or a monument. Or a landscape. Or a country. It's inevitable. Not everyone is blessed with getting caught in traffic.

Question To Think About: What is this piece about?

Step 3: Write your own Creative Nonfiction piece about a real object, event, person, place, or thing in your life. Make it creative, entertaining, but real. Word count should be between 400 and 600 words.

Step 4: Revise your piece and then type it up and put a copy in a folder to add to your 4th Quarter Portfolio.