EXERCISE: WRITING ABOUT PLACE

Topic: Writing/Language Arts

Level: Grades: 6-12

Time: 45 min for writing, 15 for discussion, plus time for individual writing and editing

Materials: writing supplies. Optional: place-based writing samples, see THV’s website.

INSTRUCTIONS

These steps can be completed as an independent homework assignment or supervised classwork.

• Pick a place – a school yard, cafeteria, park, library, coffee shop, etc. Find a spot there where you can observe your surroundings. Depending on students’ ages and need for supervision, you may want to give more or less guidance on where they should go.

• Ask students to make two columns on a blank sheet of paper -- the left column is for Details/Descriptions. The right for Notes/Reflections.

• Ask students to write 10 details about the place – colors, smells, people, activities, wildlife, landscape, etc. -- in the left column.

• Then, ask them to reflect on at least five observations – thoughts, reactions, feelings, assumptions, questions, curiosities, judgements – and write them on the right side.

SHARE AND DISCUSS

• Divide students into small groups and ask them to discuss how the details they observed contribute to a “sense of place” or lack thereof.

• Then, ask them to share and discuss their reasons for choosing the places they chose and their reflections on the place and why a sense of place is or isn’t important.

BUILD

• Invite students to use their observations – and/or observations they’ve made during past visits – to write a poem or short essay about their place.

• Encourage students to build on their most powerful memories, feelings, or reflections.

Conceived and developed by Alex Ramey, THV Student Conservation Associate, 2016.