Writing About Place

Conceived and developed by Alex Ramey, THV Student Conservation Associate, 2016
Place in the Hudson Valley

The Hudson Valley’s extensive natural and historical resources, make it a special place.
Why Write about Place?

– **Build appreciation** of and a desire to care for culture, history, and nature in our communities.

– **Help students make sense of the past.**

– **Encourage students to think about the future.**

– **Develop students’ ability to think critically** about their place and its unique resources, character, and challenges.

– **Address Common Core standards.**

  CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4(3)
  – Produces clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

  CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7(3)
  – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

  CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7(3)a
  – Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.
“When authors write about the people and places they know, or the things they do, we hear truth.”

University of Maine, *Writing about Place*
Approaches to Place-Based Writing

Place-based writing can be

• About parks, museums, historic sites, homes, or communities.

• Creative, e.g., prose and poetry.

• Purposeful, e.g., letters, travel brochures, petitions, or news articles.
I had spent a week in the Bahamas, and while I was there, wishing my daughter could see those sparkling blue bays and sandy coves, I did exactly what she would have done: I collected shells. Spiky murexes, smooth purple moon shells, ancient-looking whelks sand-blasted by the tide--I tucked them in the pockets of my shirt and shorts until my lumpy, suspect hemlines gave me away, like a refugee smuggling the family fortune.

– *High Tide in Tucson*, Barbara Kingsolver

Minna’s Court Street was the old Brooklyn, a placid ageless surface alive underneath with talk, with deals and casual insults, a neighborhood political machine with pizzeria and butcher-shop bosses and unwritten rules everywhere. All was talk except for what mattered most, which were unspoken understandings.

– *Motherless Brooklyn*, Jonathan Lethem
Storm King is a haven for so many and so much. The art center has sparked many of my writing ideas. It has made me eager and determined to produce some of my own, original art. Although it is beautiful and extraordinary, it doesn’t compare to the memories I have there. Some with family and some with new friends. It is a reminder of the eventful experiences there. Through these experiences, I have gained more understanding and appreciation for art, and the positive impact it has on me and others.

Words and photo from Therese Fischer
Newburgh Free Academy, Newburgh City Schools
2016 THV writing contest winner
I’ve been calling the Hudson Valley “home,” for as long as I could speak.... My family, mainly hunters and farmers, has cherished the different stories and experiences that have been passed down from generation to generation, but none match in comparison to those that have taken place on Little Tonche Mountain.

... The mountain itself stands tall and majestic, emerging from the dense forests and thicket in Wittenberg. *Her gravelly body, covered in windy back roads, vast forests, and patches of meadows is called home by only a few people.*

—*Brandon Angevine*, Onteora MS, Ulster County  
2014 THV Writing About Place winner
Come to Olana, the treasure house, the Garden of Eden. Come see the views, the gold coins, the bright red apples on the tree of knowledge, shining in the midday sun.

Take yourself back to the time of Frederic Church, a man whose incredible wealth allowed him anywhere on earth....

– Daisy Dundas, grade 5, Dutchess Day School
2015 THV writing contest winner
Writing Contest

• Teaching the Hudson Valley’s annual writing contest is focused on writing about parks, museums, and historic sites in the Valley.

• The contest is open to all K-12 students in the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area.

• Practicing place-based writing before introducing students to the contest prompts tends to produce the best work.

• Submissions are due by midnight, November 10, 2017.

• Guidelines, teachingthehudsonvalley.org/placewriting2017/