

## Elementary School Writing Prompts

Please note that writing prompts should always be pursued in emotionally-safe environments with the supervision of someone who is interested in encouraging good writing, self-awareness, and reflection. A wonderful resource is Pat Schneider's *Writing Alone and With Others*.

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When you introduce these prompts to students, consider using the matching quotations about writing, available at the [Great Quotations](#) link.

### **Prompt #1: Ain't No Mountain High Enough**

Draw a mountain. How tall will it be? How wide? How rocky? Are there animals? Flowers? Trees and other plants? Now imagine yourself climbing this mountain. Now write a description of this mountain, telling us the most interesting parts. Write as if you were making a movie of this mountain and wanted people to see it. What do you discover as you climb? What's at the top? What's on the other side?

### **Prompt #2: Seven Ways to Say It But Only One Can Stay!**

1. Look at yourself in the mirror or another person. Find seven ways to describe your face and body or someone else's. You can pick any parts to describe. What colors do you see? What shapes do you see? What lines do you see? What shadows do you see? What length, height, and width do you see? Make a list of those seven details.
2. Now pretend you are a movie director and you as the writer get to point the camera anywhere so people can see you. Write seven sentences showing us how the camera moves to describe you.
3. Pick your favorite sentence that you wrote but do not tell anyone.
4. Now read the description to someone you know. Ask the person to pick out his or her favorite detail, the one detail that stood out the most.
5. Talk together about why that detail seems interesting or important to the other person. Did you use descriptive adjectives to show color and shape? Did you talk about lines or shadows? Did you talk about size?

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Did you help the other person really see what you see? Share your favorite detail and talk about why it is interesting and important to you.

### **Prompt #3: The Secret Story**

Imagine you are someone else. Change your age - what age do you want to be? Change your height - how tall or short do you want to be? Change where you live - where do you want to live? Do you want to be a boy or a girl? Do you want to have a special talent?

Now pretend you are this new person. Write the secret story that this person would never tell. This is a story of something important that has happened to this person and there is a good reason he or she does not want to tell it. Did you do something bad or good and don't want anybody to know? Do you live somewhere special or awful and want to keep it secret? Do you know something that nobody else knows?

### **Prompt #4: Super Slo-Mo**

Choose one of the following thirty-second-or-less events and describe all the interesting people, places, and things that might appear during that thirty seconds.

- A girl drops her ice cream cone from the fifty-secondth floor of a building
- A runner competes in a fifty-yard dash
- A contestant sings a song to audition for a part
- A dog chases a cat through several streets of a neighborhood

After you write the scene, talk with a partner and choose the most interesting moment. Now, slow that moment down and write four sentences describing everything that can happen in that very few seconds. What does the person or animal see, feel, smell, hear, taste, and touch during that few seconds?

### **Prompt #5: Rejection**

Have you ever tried to be someone's friend but the person didn't want to be yours? Have you ever been picked last for a team? Have you ever waited for someone and the person did not arrive? Think about a tough time when you felt rejected. It may hurt to remember it, but sometimes, we have to think about difficult times to understand how to get through them.

1. Tell the story of what happened, just as you remember. Include what you felt and what was said. Describe the place where it happened.
2. Now, tell another story. Choose between two options:
  - a. Tell the story again. Tell it the way you wish it happened. Share your feelings, what was said, where you were. OR
  - b. Tell the story of a time when you rejected someone else. Tell the story of what happened, just as you remember. Include what you felt and what was said. Describe the place where it happened.
  - c. Share your story with someone you trust and talk about how to feel better after a time of rejection. If you have rejected someone else, can you do something to make the situation better?

### **Prompt #6: What Color Are You?**

Colors express all kinds of feelings, and we use language to help describe how we feel. Some people say, "I am blue," when they are sad, and "I'm seeing red," when they are angry. Can you think of any other ways we use colors to describe feelings? Try yellow and green and see what you might have heard.

Describe how you have felt today, yesterday, and the day before. Think of times when you felt sadness, anger, joy, peace, jealousy, and fear. Draw a picture of your heart and divide it up like a pizza or a patchwork quilt. Then use any color to color in parts of your heart that have those feelings. Match a color to each feeling

Now write about one of those feelings. Begin with this sentence, "When I feel \_\_\_\_\_ (name the emotion), I am \_\_\_\_\_ (name the color)." Now tell a story about that time. Use lots of detail: what did you see, hear, smell, taste, and/or touch that day you had this feeling?"

### **Prompt #7: Up On High**

Have you ever flown in a plane or a helicopter? Have you ever stood on something that is several feet high? Then you know what it's like to look down on people, places, animals, land, and things and see how much smaller they are. How did you feel when you were up there?

Pretend you are in a plane, a helicopter, or on top of the tallest building you have ever seen. Now imagine that you can fly anywhere to help someone or something. Write a short story after thinking about these questions:

- Who or what will you help?
- Why?
- How will you help them?
- Did it work? Why or why not?
- What will happen next?

You can also imagine the opposite story: picture that you are the person on the ground. Who or what will come help you, and why? How do you feel about it?

### **Prompt #8:**

Option 1: What Starts or Stops the Crying?

Have you ever done something and the result was someone cried? Have you ever helped someone stop crying and made them feel better? Tell that story. What happened? Why do you think things happened that way? What choices did you make that you wouldn't make again?

Then write the answer to this question: What do you know now that you didn't know then? You might consider questions such as:

What starts someone crying?  
What stops crying?

Option #2: Why We Cry

Does it ever help to cry sometimes? Or does it always hurt? Tell a story about when you or someone else cried and how you feel about it now. Are you glad

there was crying? Why or why not? Do you wish it hadn't happened? Why or why not? What does your family say about crying? Do you know why your family says this?

**Prompt #9:**

**Option 1: Big Books, Little Books**

What's the longest book you've ever read? The shortest? Do you like longer or shorter books? Why?

Imagine that you own a publishing company and you can publish a book of any length. Write a letter to the people who work with you explaining the best number of words or pages for a book and why you believe this length works the best.

**Option 2: Books of the Future**

Imagine what books will be like 25 years from now. Will books always look the way they do now? Will they be made of paper and a certain length?

Describe a scene where you picture yourself reading a book. What will the book look like? Feel like? Sound like? Smell like? Where will you get your book?

**Prompt #10:**

**Option 1: Making the World a Better Place.**

What do you do to make the world a better place? Think of the littlest things you do. Is it saying please and thank you? Is it helping someone who needs it? Is it speaking up when someone is doing something wrong? Is it apologizing for something you have done?

Make a list of things you do to improve the lives of others around you and to make your life kinder, friendlier, and fairer.

Then tell a story about one of these times when you made a good choice. What did you do? What did others do? What did people say? What was the outcome?

## Option 2: Naming Justice

What does the word “justice” mean to you? How do you know when something is “just”?

Write about something you have heard about in the news that is just or something that is unjust. How do you know when something is just – or not?

## Prompt #11: The Big Questions

We all have questions that no one seems to know the answer to. What questions do you wish someone would answer? What questions are really exciting to you? What questions keep you up at night? What questions would you like to ask but are too afraid to ask?

Think of someone whom you believe knows a lot. Think of a question you would like to ask that person.

Write a list of ten big questions you have. Then write about how you would find the answer to one of them. Who would you need to talk to? Where might you go to find out? What else would you need to do?

Optional: Write a letter to someone who can help you answer this question.

## Prompt #12: I Would Like to Lead...

Imagine that you could have any leadership position in the world. You could be mayor, governor, legislator, chief of police, or a general, a coach, or a chief executive officer (CEO) of a company. You could be President of the United States!

Think about why you would run for this office. What special qualities and abilities would you bring to the job?

List all the qualities that you possess that would help you be a good leader. Now write a brief speech to the people who need to hear about you and why you would be a good leader.

### **Prompt #13:**

#### **Option #1: Difference is Good!**

America is a country of many different types of people. What are special qualities do you possess that make you different from other people? Think about your looks; think about what language you speak at home; think about places you have lived. Think about talents you have; think about things you know how to do that other people might not know. Think about your personality.

Now think about someone who is very different than you. This might be a friend or a classmate or a family member. How is this person different than you?

Write a poem about you and this person you know. Describe and celebrate your differences. What is great about being different?

#### **Option #2: Where We Come From**

America is full of people who come from many different countries or parts of the United States. Where were your parents born? Where were your grandparents born? Does any of your family live outside the United States?

Talk to your family and write the stories of how long you have lived where you are and whether the rest of your family has ever lived somewhere else. If there are any sad or funny events to describe, tell those stories, too.

### **Prompt #14: Thankfulness**

What things and people make you happy? Who or what are you grateful for?

Make a list of ten people and things – places, objects, events – that give you joy. Choose one and write a poem, a song, a letter, or a prayer (or a combination of any of these) that explains why you are thankful for this part of your life.

### **Prompt #15: Holiday Songs**

Many people celebrate special holidays in the fall and winter. Part of the celebration includes music. What special songs do you love to sing and hear during the holiday season?

#### **Option #1: Favorite Song**

Pick a favorite song and write down some of the lyrics you remember. It can be one or several sentences. Then explain why this song is so special to you. What feelings does the song give you? What memories? What special events happen when you hear the song? Does the song have a special history?

#### **Option #2 Holiday Soundtrack**

Imagine that you have been asked to make a special holiday album of songs. What are the top ten songs you would want to include? List the songs and include the liner notes, which is the explanation of each song and why you chose it. Explain how each song can make the holiday season special.

### **Prompt #16: Hot or Cold**

Temperatures can be very intense this time of year. When was a time when you were really, really cold - or really, really hot?

Step back into that moment. Remember how your fingers and toes felt and nose felt; what your eyes saw; what your ears heard; what your tongue tasted; what your nose smelled. Write a scene where you step back into that setting and describe how the temperature was unforgettable.

### **Prompt #17: A Big Lesson**

Did you ever have a moment when you suddenly realized, *I know something new!* It could be learning how to write your name, tie your shoes, or ride a bike. It could be learning how to divide numbers or how to spell a word. It could be understanding something new about history that happened before you born, or playing music, or painting a picture. When you learned this new piece of information or a new skill, you suddenly changed.

Write the story of learning something new.

- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- How did it happen?
- How did you feel?
- How do you feel now?

**Prompt #18:**

It's a New Year! Does it feel like one to you?

On New Year's some people make resolutions – goals and promises – that they plan to follow throughout the next 12 months. Is there a goal you would like to achieve?

Write a story about yourself and set it in December, 2009. Describe something that will happen because you made a goal and followed it. Will you make a new friend? Will you try a new sport or art such as music? Will you meet a challenge you have always wanted to meet? Whatever you imagine, picture yourself achieving it.

**Prompt #19: Tougher Than the Rest**

Who do you know who is “tough”? By tough, we mean someone who is strong inside and out. They have what is called character. They can stand strong when difficulty strikes. They can pick themselves up when things are really unpleasant. For example: a person who loses their job and works hard to find another, or a person who is injured and keeps a good attitude in spite of all the pain.

Write a poem of admiration to the person who you see as a strong role model. You can spell out their name and write a name poem, one line for every letter in their name. You can list several examples of all the ways that this person shows toughness and strength. Or you can tell about one time when you saw this person show great toughness.

### **Prompt #20: Thanks to My Family**

Think about people in your family (and by family, it can be people you live with, friends, or any way you think of family) who have given you a lot of help in your life. Who's been a really big help?

Maybe it was the person who taught you a sport or how to sing a song. Maybe it was the person who helped you up when you got hurt. It could be a person who made great sacrifices in order for you to have things you enjoy. Think of someone who has given a lot to you and who you appreciate.

Write an inscription for a thank you card. This should be a special thank you card, the kind you can't find in a store. That's because you will make this card very personal. Write the person an inscription that is one of two kinds:

- A Complimentary List. Title this card, The Top Ten Things I Like About You , and inside write your list, or
- You are a/the \_\_\_\_\_. Compare this person to something strong, beautiful, or impressive in nature (such as mountain, flower, sun, ocean, stars). List all the ways that this person is like this beautiful part of nature.

### **Prompt #21: Telling Time**

Are you usually on time? Or do you tend to run late? How do you and time get along?

Imagine that Time and you are having a conversation. Tell Time all about how easy or hard it is for you to be on time, and while you're talking, let Time know anything else on your mind: whether you like having a clock or watch in your life, and if Time is going to change anything, you would recommend that s/he or it change \_\_\_\_\_ first....

### **Prompt #22: What Makes Me Happy?**

Make a list of ten people, ten places, ten activities, and ten things that make you happy. You should have forty items on your list by the end.

Now circle one from each list and write a sentence about each that explains why this person, place, activity, or thing brings you happiness. If you can, use “Words I Can’t Touch” – words such as love, hope, joy, excitement, safety, fun – to explain why.

Write a poem called “How to Make Me Happy.” In this poem, mention your favorite people, places, activities, and things that bring you joy.

### **Prompt #23: My Motto**

A motto is a short saying that gives you help when you’re having a bad day. Maybe you’ve heard:

- Chin up!
- If you want a friend, be a friend.
- TEAM: Together Everyone Achieves More

Do you, your family, or friends have a motto that helps you get through tough times? Write down as many mottos as you can think of, or make up a new one. Then write about a bad day when this motto helped you or could have helped you.

### **Prompt #24: My Place**

Do you have a place to go to where it’s quiet and you can think? Where you have some special objects that are important to you? This might be a room, or the public library, or a gym, or even the bathroom! Where do you go to find quiet and hear yourself think?

If you have a place like that, describe it and explain what kind of thinking you do there. If you do not have a special place to go to, explain why it is hard to find one.

### **Prompt #25: The Perfect Place**

Imagine a perfect room, the room you would love to have. What colors would the walls be? What sounds would you hear when entering this room? What special objects? Paint a picture of the sights, sounds, smells, and even tastes and touches this room might have .

### **Prompt #26: Favorite Tale**

What story did you read over and over, or hear over and over, when you were very small? What song? Why was it so important to you to hear this favorite story or song many times?

Retell the story or write down the lyrics, as much as you can remember.

Then underline or highlight your favorite parts.

Now imagine you are making a movie. Which parts would make the best movie and why? Draw the scene or line that you think people would really understand and enjoy.

### **Prompt #27: A Time You Were Told No**

Think of times you have been told no. Were you doing something wrong? Were you doing something you thought was right?

Describe each time.

As you describe the time you did something wrong, explain why you were wrong and why it was good someone told you no.

When you describe the time you did something write, explain why you were right and why it was not so good that someone told you no. How would you explain to this person now your feelings about what you did?

If you could go back to either time, would you? Why or why not? Would you do things differently?