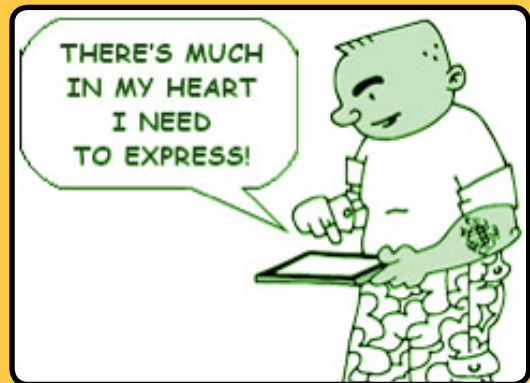
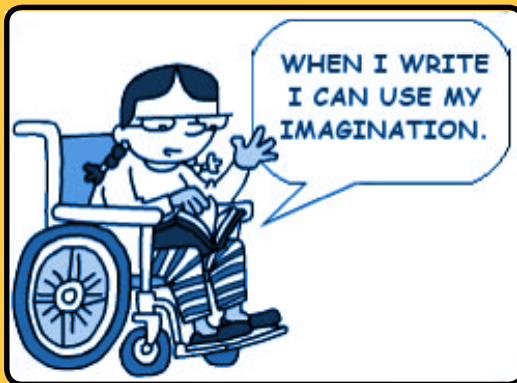


# SOMETHING TO WRITE ABOUT:

**Writing Prompts for English Language Learners  
and Literacy Students**



**by Bill Zimmerman**

Creator, [Somethingtowriteabout.com](http://Somethingtowriteabout.com)

and [MakeBeliefsComix.com](http://MakeBeliefsComix.com)

Art by Tom Bloom



**This Book Belongs To**

(TYPE YOUR NAME HERE)

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Art by Tom Bloom

**An Interactive Digital Journal  
from MakeBeliefsComix.com**

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Book design: Barbara Berasi

The author welcomes comments and suggestions about what you would like to see included in future editions.

Please write to: William Zimmerman,  
Guarionex Press Ltd.  
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Thank you.

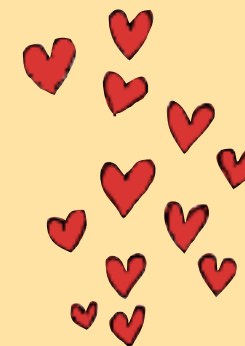
For other books by Bill Zimmerman,  
visit <http://www.billztreasurechest.com>  
or <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com>

The comic characters used throughout this book were drawn by Tom Bloom and created for MakeBeliefsComix.com.

## DEDICATION

In memory of my grandparents who immigrated to the United States from Europe and who struggled to learn the English language.

I also dedicate this book to my students who used many of the writing prompts in this book and who always wrote wonderful things from their hearts.



And special thanks for their support and encouragement to Donna Kelsh, Executive Director, and Mark Brik, Education Director, Institute for Immigrant Concerns, New York City, and to Ken English, Literacy Program Director at New York Public Library. All three people widened my world and gave me an opportunity to try new ideas.

—BZ

## A Word to Teachers and Students...

Write from your heart!  
It speaks your special truth.



### Dear Reader,

This book is about nothing other than things to write about... your family, your friends, your old life and your new life, feelings, dreams and goals.

I created this book of writing prompts over the years teaching English language learners and literacy students. Its intent is to help students discover their writers' voices and express the rich thoughts within them as they master the English language.

These writing prompts encourage students of all ages to write about the things in their lives that are meaningful to them—their childhood memories and family stories, the people they love and admire, their hopes for the future, their deepest beliefs. *I have always believed that everyone has a story to tell—if only someone would ask, if only someone would listen.* This book gives teachers a way to draw out students' stories and help them communicate their thoughts through writing.

Encouraging immigrant students to write is so important because it helps them better weather the enormous stress they experience as they learn their hard-won English language and adjust to life in a new land far away from their original homes. Students have told me that they often feel overwhelmed by the pressures of adjusting to a new country and hide their feelings, keeping them locked inside. Writing can change this, *writing has the power to help us find self-understanding and hope and take pride in our lives.* As someone who was very shy and verbally inarticulate as a child, as someone who had difficulty speaking up, I remember the power I felt when I began to express my ideas on paper and have those ideas read by others. Even today, I'd rather write than talk.

*Much of my work in encouraging students to write is to help them tap into the memories which feed and nurture them. By asking students to recall their past, teachers help them reveal the great richness of their lives. From the stories they write about their lives and then read in class, we learn from these writers that they are more than just struggling students who are trying to improve their English skills. We recognize them as full human beings with a history behind them and a future ahead. They are worthy of our respect and deserve to be heard.*

*In using the writing prompts in the classroom, I usually also provide some reading material that will relate to the prompt we will use that day. For example, if we are to write about a favorite relative or friend, I might provide as handouts a short essay, newspaper clipping or book excerpt in which the writer talks about such a person. Students take turns reading this aloud. Then we discuss the content. All this prepares students to think about the day's subject. (A rich resource for such handouts is the excellent annual Literacy Review of immigrants' writings published by New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study—<http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/undergraduate/writing/literacyproject.html>.)*



*As my students write, I play a CD with some quiet, meditative music to help them relax and get in touch with their memories and thoughts. The music helps transform the classroom into a sacred writing space where the most wonderful writing is done.*

*When the students complete their pieces, they are encouraged to read aloud what they have written. Doing so helps validate the importance of the thoughts they have expressed in their written words and broadens the thinking of the other students. *We quickly learn that each of us has something valuable to impart to others.* Students also are welcome to first experiment with their essay ideas by creating a comic strip at [MakeBeliefsComix.com](http://MakeBeliefsComix.com), another useful resource for the classroom.*

I hope that this book of writing prompts will spark your imagination as you develop your own writing ideas. I hope, too, that by using these prompts you will discover many special things about your students' lives. They want someone to read and listen to their special stories. This book pays honor to them.

Sincerely,

*Bill Zimmerman*

Bill Zimmerman

Creator, [Somethingtowriteabout.com](http://Somethingtowriteabout.com) and [MakeBeliefsComix.com](http://MakeBeliefsComix.com)

P.S. This book is formatted as an interactive digital journal. When downloaded, it will allow your students to type directly on their computer screens into the areas with lines on the blank pages that face the writing prompts. When a student is done typing, simply save the document until the next time she or he is inspired to make new entries. Students also can print out any pages that they want.

You can find additional writing ideas in the other MakeBeliefsComix e-books:

- [Hummingbird Joy](#): A Book of All the Things That Make You Happy
- [Laptop Letters](#): Sending Wise & Loving Messages to Young People in Your Life
- [Make Beliefs to Spark Your Writing](#): Words I Wish Someone Had Told Me As a Kid
- [MakeBeliefsComix FILL-ins](#)

And please try out the many writing ideas at my writing blog, [Somethingtowriteabout.com](http://Somethingtowriteabout.com).

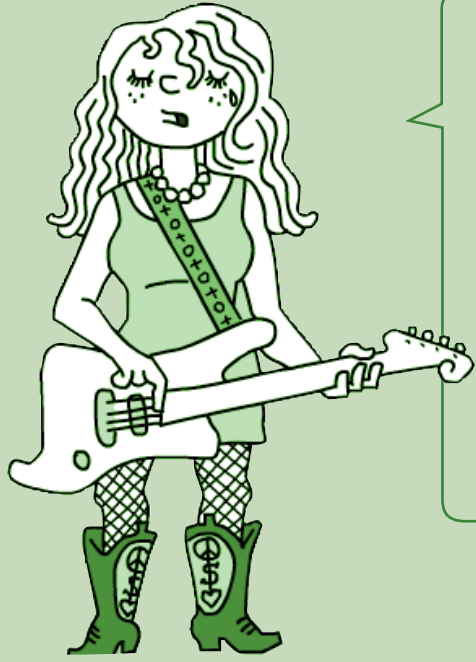
## Writing Prompts to Spark Your Imagination...











## Write Their Diaries For The Day

**Three people in three different parts of the world wake up one morning, each expecting the day to be like all the others. But for one, in Mexico, this will turn into the most important day of her life. For another, in China, the day will be the happiest she will ever experience. And for the third, in Chicago, this will become his saddest day.**

Write each of these people's diaries for the day.

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## Write About A Good Friend

**Who would you say is your best friend? Maybe he or she is a childhood friend whom you knew when you were very young, living in your homeland. Maybe that person is a relative, such as a brother or sister, or mother or father, or cousin. Maybe your best friend is a grandparent. Maybe your best friend is your spouse or partner. Or maybe your best friend is someone whom you just met in this country.**

For some people, their best friend may be a cat or dog or some animal they can talk to and who loves them unconditionally. I remember that my own dog, Nena, always was there to help me when I felt sad and alone. She would come to lick my face and cheer me up.

Why is this person or creature your best friend? What makes them so special? What is their name? What kinds of things do you do together or talk about? Did you have adventures with this good friend? Did you have happy or sad times together? Why do you feel so comfortable with this person?

If you don't have a best friend, then write about a person whom you admire or like. Or write about what it means to be a good friend to someone.

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## Write A Letter To A Friend Whom You Haven't Seen For A Long Time

**Sit in a quiet place and think of an old friend or relative whom you have not seen in a long time. Share your life with your friend by writing a letter to this person.**

Tell him or her about some of the important things that have happened to you in your life since you last met. Before you write your letter, make some notes about two or three of the most important changes in your life. Perhaps one of the changes is your moving to a new country. Perhaps another change is your adjusting to a new life which is different from the life that you knew in your former homeland—what is different now?

Perhaps you have returned to school or have a new love or even a child who has been born to you. Perhaps you are working in a new job. Or, perhaps you have changed a lot from the person you once were. Maybe you have lost a family member. There are happy and sad things you want to tell that person. Have you had some funny or strange experiences that you wish to share? What are the important things you want to tell your friend?

In writing your letter, imagine that your friend is in the room with you and that you are having a conversation together. Perhaps you have a photograph of your friend that you can look at while you are writing your letter to him or her. What would you say to that friend or relative?

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## Write About Your Name

**What is your name?  
Does your name have a special meaning in another language?  
If so, what does it mean?**

- Who gave you your name?
- Were you named after someone special?
- Do you like or hate your name?
- If you could choose another name for yourself what would it be? Why would you call yourself that name?
- What names of other people do you like? Why?
- Do you think you were given the right name, or should you have been named something different?
- What is your favorite name?
- How do you feel when people speak your name?
- Do you know your name in other languages?
- Have you ever given someone a name? How did you choose it?

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## Tell The Story Of An Immigrant

Imagine that you know this immigrant (perhaps it is you). Write the story of this person's life.

- Why did he or she come to the United States?
- Where did they come from?
- What are their hopes and dreams in coming to this new country?
- Did they leave their families behind in their former country?
- Are they happy, or afraid, or hopeful, or worried?

- What do they think about?
- What do they hope to accomplish in life?
- Will they have a hard or easy life in this country?
- What will be their future?
- What kind of work will they do? Will they get married and have a family?

Try to tell the story of this immigrant. You can start your essay in the first person with these words:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ . I come from \_\_\_\_\_ .

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## Write About Your Own Life

**What is the most important thing that ever happened to you?**

- What was your greatest adventure?
- Your biggest success?
- Your greatest failure?
- Your greatest accomplishment?
- Your deepest dream?
- Do you remember any especially funny or sad stories about your life? What are they?

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## Write A Message Of Hope

**An Indonesian boy leaves a message of hope written on a paper flower outside a mosque on the anniversary of the tsunami that killed thousands of people in his province. The flower messages are a beautiful way of marking an event or putting a prayer or spiritual thought on paper.**

What messages of hope would you place on your paper flower?

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## **What Kind Of Business Would You Like To Own? Or, What Kind of Job Would You Like to Have?**

**For many people the American dream is to own their own business. Each year thousands of people in the United States start their own small businesses or enterprises. We call them entrepreneurs.**

This may include businesses that are food shops or restaurants, retail stores, home cleaning services, or a business that imports or exports products. Some businesses grow very successfully, but some fail because the owners do not have enough expertise or because the market is not large enough to support the services or products they provide. It's not easy having your own business—you worry about it all the time, you work long hours and can't take days off. But if you are successful, the rewards can be wonderful—wealth and independence and pride.

**What about you? If you could start your own business, what kind of business would it be?** Why would you choose this type of business? Do you have any experience in this field of work? What special skills do you have that would help you in your business? Do you think there is a need or market for your work? Write about the dream business you would like to run.

Or, if you don't want to operate your own business but prefer instead to work for a company which gives you a regular salary, then write about your dream job. What kind of work would you like to do, and why?

**If you like, you can even write about your very first job or the best or worse job you ever had.**

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## Tell Me About Something That Makes You Feel Proud

**Everyone has something to be proud about. Maybe you're proud of yourself for having been able to make a new life for yourself and your family in a new country despite the great difficulties you faced.**

Maybe you're proud of being able to master the English language.

Maybe you're proud of something you accomplished in your studies, such as completing your education.

Maybe you're proud of something you did on your job—your boss called you a hard worker and told you that you make a valuable contribution.

Maybe you're proud of a talent you have developed, such as creating art or singing or sewing or raising flowers or plants in your home or garden.

Maybe you're proud of earning your independence and being able to take care of yourself and your family.

Maybe you are proud of having been able to overcome terrible problems by working hard to solve them. What were these problems?

Maybe you were able to overcome big obstacles and through hard work and determination accomplish some goal which you weren't sure you could do. What did you accomplish?

Write about the things that make you proud of yourself. It is important to remember these positive things.

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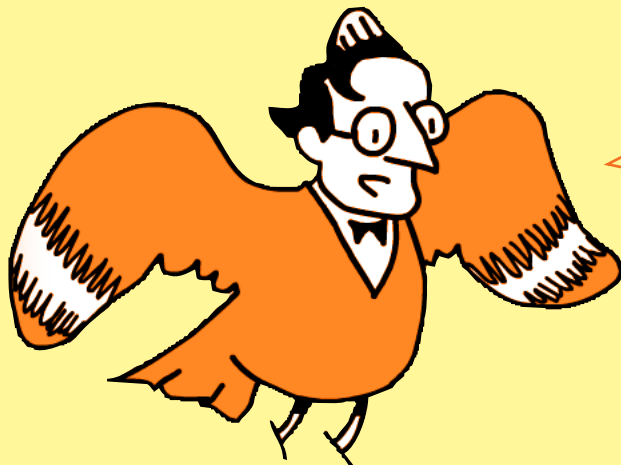
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## **What Does Freedom Mean To You?**

**What do you do with freedom?**

- How does freedom smell? What does it taste like?
- Does freedom have a bad side as well as a good side?
- How does being free make you feel?
- When in your life have you felt you were in a prison?
- When in your life have you felt free?
- **Do you feel free now? Or, do you feel tied down?**

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## Who Is Your Hero?

**Each of us has a hero in our life. Maybe it is a loving parent. Maybe it is a teacher who was kind to us and helped us learn how to read and write.**

Maybe your hero is a boss who has helped you grow and succeed in your job.

Maybe it is someone who has given you a helping hand in this new country.

Maybe your hero is someone you read about in the newspaper or saw on television. Perhaps someone who did something special with his or her life that helps make the world a little better. Perhaps your hero is a writer, an artist or an athlete.

Or, maybe your hero is a fictional character whom you read about in a novel and you decided you wanted to be like that person.

So, who is your hero? What makes them so special to you? What did they accomplish? Why do you want to be like them? **And, do you think that you are a hero to someone, too?**

Please write about your hero and why she or he is important to you.

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## Tell Me About Your Favorite Hobby

**Most people have hobbies that they enjoy. Some people, for example, like to play a musical instrument when they have free time.**

**Other people like to sing. Some like to read books.**

**Some people collect coins or have stamp collections. Some love to dance or cook or draw, while others study martial arts and participate in sports.**

What is your special hobby? What kind of things do you do in your free time that you feel strongly and passionately about? Write

about your special hobby and what it means to your life. When did you first begin your hobby and what has it taught you?

Or, is there a new hobby that you would like to begin? What is it?

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## What If You Could Become A Character In A Movie?

In the movies you find yourself suddenly about to step into the screen to play a part in the film being shown. You can influence the outcome of events and interact with all the characters.

What movie would you like to step into?  
What would happen in the movie you “enter”—  
how would the movie change?  
What would your character be like?

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## Write About The Simple Pleasures In Your Life

A newspaper columnist writes about a few of his favorite things guaranteed to lighten his heart or bring a smile to his face. As examples, he writes about seeing a fox walk across a bridge; watching a dog that jerks its hind leg in its sleep—and even “walking into a public restroom and discovering that it is equipped with actual paper towels, not a dryer that weakly blows lukewarm air on your hands.” Simple things, yes?

My simple things include:

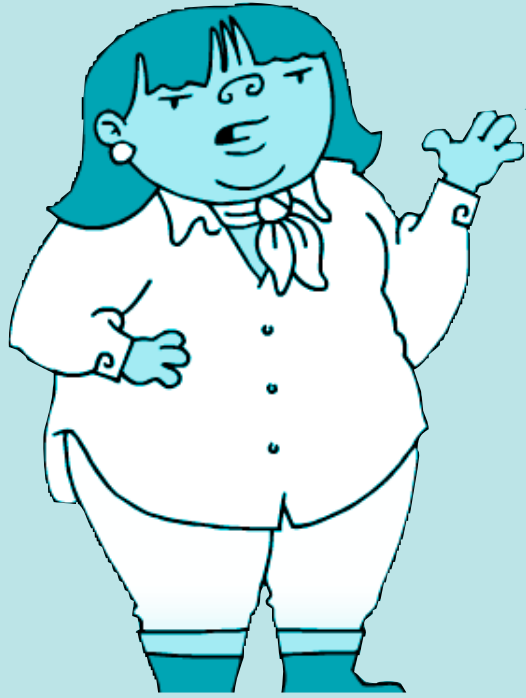
- Being warmly greeted by my dog when I come home—my dog makes me feel like a bright light has returned to her life and all is right in her world.
- My wife lovingly rubbing my neck when it is so stiff that I can hardly turn my head.
- Sitting down at the kitchen table at night after dinner with a new book in my hands.
- Now, what about you? Write about the simple pleasures in your own life, the ones that make life so rich for you and yet rarely cost any money?

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## What Will This Key Open?

**We use keys to open many things.**

**Some keys open doors—such as the door to your home, or the door to your car, or the drawer in your desk where you store special things.**

Some keys can open treasure chests filled with all the things which you consider valuable.

Some keys can open your personal diary where you write about the important things in your life.

Or, maybe you have given someone you love the “key” to your heart or to your soul.

Imagine that someone gave you a key to open something. Write about what the key will open. If the key opens a door, for example, then write about what is on the other side of the door.

If the key opens a treasure box or hope chest, then write about what is hidden inside the box.

Or, you can begin your writing with the following sentence:

She put the key into the lock, turned it and ....

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## Write A Letter To A Child You Love Or Hope To Love One Day

Sometimes in our lives we are lucky enough to receive a letter which we want to keep our entire life. We treasure such letters because of the wonderful things they say to us—they may speak loving and tender thoughts, or they may be filled with wisdom and good advice to help us live better lives. I always tell adults how important it is to write such letters to their children and express all their hopes and dreams for their future and how important their children are to them.

I would like you to write a letter to a child, too. It could be to a young person in your life now, such as a son, daughter, grandchild, nephew, niece or cousin. Or, if you don't have a child, write to one who might be born in the future. Perhaps you might even decide to write a letter to the child you once were. (Think about your receiving the letter that you always wanted but never did receive.)

In your letter, write about your hopes and dreams for your child. What are the things you want for them? What kind of person do you want them to grow up to become? What values do you want them to have? Write about the kind of world you hope your child will live in in the future. In your letter, you can offer advice or wisdom you have learned in your own life which you would like to share with them. Or, write something about your own life which you want the child to know.

Write a beautiful letter that a young person would want to keep all of her or his life. This may be the most important letter you ever write.

(For more ideas on writing letters to children, please read our free on-line book, [Laptop Letters: Sending Wise & Loving Messages to Young People in Your Life.](#))

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## Make A Wish Or Many Wishes

You can write about all the wishes you have in your personal life for yourself, for your friends, for the people you love and care about, your pets. Even wishes for your enemies.

Let your wishes be as wild and crazy and as imaginative as you like anything is possible, such as: I wish I could fly like a bird to the top of the Empire State Building.

We can start each sentence with the words: “I wish...” Then develop the idea of the wish in the rest of the piece.

Your wishes can be serious or they can be serious or whimsical, such as, “I wish I could change the color of my skin each day to go with the color of the clothing I wear when I go to school.”

The point is to have fun in writing about wishes. Try to write at least five different wishes if you can. Or, if you want, write only about one wish but do it with several lines. Develop the idea of your wish(es) as best as you can.

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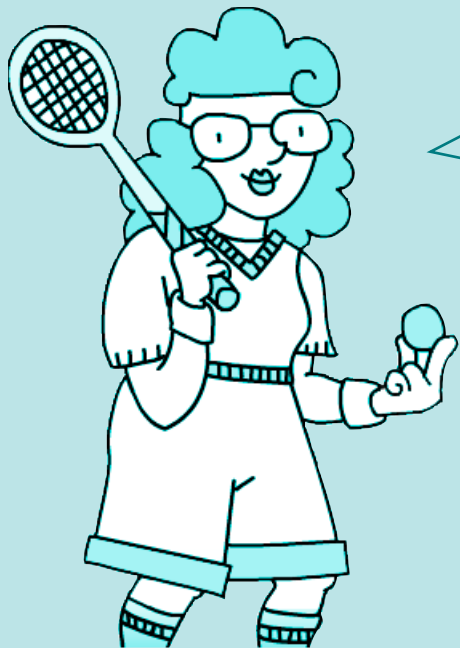
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## How Do You Want To Live Your Precious Life?

In her poem, “The Summer Day,” Mary Oliver writes about making time to look at all the beauty of the world, even to kneel in the grass to look at insects, or to walk through the fields and enjoy the day without hurrying. Life is so very short—“Doesn’t everything die at last, and too soon?” she asks (read her poem at: <http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/133.html>).

And then she ends her poem with two amazing lines to form the question:

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?”

So, dear writer, tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? What do you want to accomplish in your lifetime? What things do you want to do before you die? What things do you want to see before you leave this life? Which person do you want to love? What do you want to taste before you die? What do you want to achieve? What do you want to experience before your run out of time?

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## What Was Your First Day In The United States Like?

**In the movie "Avalon," a character who immigrated to America remembers what it was like to arrive by ship in Philadelphia from Europe on Independence Day July 4, 1914. He saw lights and fireworks and mistakenly thought they were put there specially for him to welcome him to this country. He remembered feeling so excited and happy.**

What about you? Write your own memory of what your own first day or week was like when you arrived in the United States.

Write about the impressions you had. What excited you? What frightened you? What made you laugh? What made you cry?

Were you comfortable or uncomfortable? How was this place very different from the place you had come from, and how was it similar? What was it like to speak or understand English? How did you feel with the language?

What were your hopes and expectations in coming to the United States? Why did you want to come here? Does what you have found here match your hopes and dreams? In what ways? How did people treat you?

Try to write about the feelings you had in those early days in this new country. Try to remember the day or time when you finally began to feel at home here. When was that?

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**What Would You Do To Make The World A Little Better?**

**A writer asks someone, “What is worth worrying about.”**

**The person offers a simple, profound answer: “People doing good things on this earth, leaving the world a better place. It doesn’t matter what you do—if you do for cats, fine; if you do for Uganda, fine...,” she says. But “everybody owes it to the world to make it a little better.”**

What about you? What are the things you do or can do to make the world a little better?

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## Tell Me What Makes You Happy

**I want to hear about something or someone who makes you happy.**

**Maybe it's a person who makes you smile. Maybe it's a song.**

**Maybe it's a celebration. Maybe it's a special food. Or a special place you visit. Or, maybe it's a special book or poem or prayer or belief.**

If you prefer, tell me about the happiest day in your life—what happened that day? What made it so special to you?

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## An Unforgettable Person—Someone I Will Always Remember

**Tell me about a person you cannot forget, no matter how far away they are from you now.**

Maybe it's someone in your family—for example, a grandparent or relative who is wise or loving. Or maybe it's a friend or someone who lives in your neighborhood. Maybe it's someone who makes you laugh or cheers

you up when you are sad. Maybe it's someone who always shows you love and cares deeply about you. Maybe it's someone who is still back in your homeland and you miss him or her so much. Maybe it's someone who once frightened you. Maybe it was a teacher who inspired you.

Why will you always remember this person?

Why is this person so special to you?

What are their special characteristics?

What did he or she teach you?

Describe that person to me—what does he or she look like? What is that person's name?

Did you ever have an adventure together? If so, what was it like?

Share with me a memory about that person—something that he or she said to you or did with you. What makes this person unforgettable to you?

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## Tell Me About How You Are Challenging Yourself

**Tell me about a goal you set for yourself and what you did or are doing to achieve your goal. What is the task you have set for yourself and why did you do this? Why is this goal so important to you? What do you hope to accomplish?**

How hard is the task? What progress have you made so far? How much more work do you have to do?

Once you accomplish your goal, how will you feel? How will your life be changed?

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## Tell Me About A Time When You Were Brave

**Each of us is brave in different ways and in different situations.**

**For example, there is the person who saves another person’s life by rescuing someone who falls off the subway platform.**

Then there is the person who finds the courage to leave his or her country in order to go to another land and start a new life. That person is very courageous, too, because starting a new life in a strange land and with a different language can be very difficult.

Then there’s the person who is very shy, but who leaves the house in the morning to try to find a job and make a living. He somehow does his best to overcome his fear.

There is the mother or father who works very long hours at a hard job in order to earn money to help support the family. That person is very brave, too.

There is also the person who is afraid of the local bully, but gathers his or her courage to stand up to the bully and tell him off.

So tell me about your own life and a time when you were brave. What was the brave deed or act you did? How did you feel—frightened or confident? Was it hard for you to be brave?

Or, if you wish, write about someone you know who has done a brave deed. Tell me who that person is and what he or she did.

TYPE/ WRITE HERE

Lined writing area for the student's response.





## Tell Me How You Would Like To Transform Yourself

**I remember reading about a person whose face was destroyed in an accident. Doctors and surgeons worked to transform—to change—her face into one that wouldn't frighten her and others, a face that would allow her to be active in the world again and not be ashamed of her appearance.**

There are also other kinds of transformations that each of us undergoes. How many times have you said to yourself, "I need to change my life. I want to be a different kind of person."

Or, you may have said, "I want to live a different kind of life." Or, you might have thought, "I want to give up bad habits and bad things and bad people and instead acquire good habits and good things and good friends."

Or, you might have thought to yourself, "I don't want to be afraid any longer. I want to become a more courageous and less frightened person."

So, choose one of the following writing questions:

- How would you want to transform or change yourself?
- Do you know someone who changed or transformed their life into a better life or way of living? If so, write about that person and how they changed.
- Or, if you wish, put yourself in the place of the woman whose face was destroyed and who has been helped by doctors to acquire a new face. Can you write about what she must feel, what she must worry about, how she can find the strength to go on and live her life? Would you have her courage? What are the words she says to herself to keep her going?

TYPE/ WRITE HERE

A large rectangular area with rounded corners, containing 20 horizontal lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the box.













## Describe A Room Created In Your Imagination

You receive a postcard that shows an empty room. Now, fill up this room. Imagine that you once lived in it and tell me a memory about this room. Or, imagine that you stepped into this room and knew it well.

Was this a quiet room or a noisy one?  
Was it a living room or a bedroom or a study or a kitchen?  
Tell me how it felt to be in this room when the sun came in.  
Was it a happy place—did good memories happen in this room? If so, what were the memories?  
Was it a sad place—did sad, unhappy memories occur in this room? If so, what was the sad memory?  
What kind of people lived in this room?  
Were there conversations that went on among the people? What were they like?  
Did the people in this room sing songs, or read, or talk? What did the people talk about?  
Do you think you could be happy in this room? Why?  
Would you like to live in this room? What would it be like?  
Would you like to be alone in this room or with some one?  
What would you do in this room?  
Is this the room of a writer or a painter or a small family? Is this the room of younger or older people? What are they like?

Or, if you prefer write about a favorite or remembered room from your own life. What made it so special? What happened there? You can even make up a memory about this room. Use your rich imagination where anything is possible, anything is true.

TYPE/ WRITE HERE

Lined area for writing the response.



## Write About The Most Important Letter In Your Life

Today you received the most important letter of your life—the one that you had been waiting for such a long, long time.

What does the letter say?  
How does it make you feel?  
Who sent it to you?

TYPE/ WRITE HERE

Lined writing area for the first page of the journal entry.

TYPE/ WRITE HERE  
(continued)

Lined writing area for the second page of the journal entry.



## Write About Your Deepest Wishes

The Japanese have a festival called **Tanabata** and people celebrate by **writing wishes on colorful paper and hanging the wishes on bamboo tree branches.**

I love the idea of writing wishes or blessings for people I love. This reminds me of when I visited the Wailing—or Western Wall—in Jerusalem with my wife and placed a written message to God in one of the tiny openings on the wall. I asked God for a child to enter our lives, and, in time my wife and I were blessed with a beautiful, healthy daughter.

What are the wishes or prayers or blessings that you might write on paper and hang from a tree or wall with the hope that they will be answered?

TYPE/ WRITE HERE

Lined area for writing wishes or prayers.











## Write About An Angel In Your Life

Early in the morning when I walk my dog in the darkened streets, I meet an “angel.” He is the man who delivers newspapers to the apartments in my building. He works so hard, and often his shirt and face are drenched with sweat from having to lug the heavy newspapers. But whenever we meet on the street or in the elevator, no matter how tired he is, he greets me with the widest, most beautiful smile. We then may then exchange a few words as he tries his best to communicate in broken English. His being seems to flow with happiness and good will.

I think to myself how hard his life must be, working during the night to make his deliveries, carrying his heavy load, adjusting to life in a new country far from his homeland, and yet he still finds it in him to smile with such good will. When I see him, I feel better; he teaches me how to be a little less self-preoccupied and selfish. How bad can life be, after all, when there are human beings like this man who seems to have an innate sense of goodness?

So what about you? Have you ever met a person who seems to give you hope that things are good in the world and that life can be beautiful. If so, please tell us about this “angel” in your life. Describe why she or he is so special.

TYPE/ WRITE HERE

Lined writing area for the student's response.











## What If You Could Attend Your Own Funeral And Begin Your Life Again?

A funeral for the living? That's what is happening in Thailand. People are flocking to a Buddhist temple where they seek a fresh new life in which they have left all their cares and worries of the past. As an article in *The New York Times* described it, "Nine big pink coffins dominate the grand hall of the temple, and every day hundreds of people take their turns climbing into a coffin for a few moments as monks chant a dirge. Then, at a command, the visitors clamber out again cleaned—they believe—of the past."

This takes just a few minutes and a donation, then the people feel reborn. One person who sought luck in business and relief for his aching back and knees said, "If I lie down in the coffin, it will give me a new lease on life."

What do you think about this? Would you want to be reborn, too? How, if at all, would you want to change your life?

TYPE/ WRITE HERE

Lined writing area for student response.



**Write Your Personal 'Joy List'**

**I once read about a man who carried around with him a little notebook which he called a "Joy List." In it he would jot down all the moments that made him smile or laugh. It was his way of cultivating a sense of happiness about being alive and enjoying his life.**

He learned to do this from a 13 year-old boy who was dying of lymphoma and who handed him a list of more than 100 memories of the happy moments in his life, like camping or going to Disney World. The boy asked the man to give the list to his parents so that they would remember that their son had fun mo-

ments, too, in his short life. My own aged cousin kept a list of all the good things in life which she would like to see go on forever and ever.

Your turn now: make up your own list of things that give you joy and happiness. Which of those would you like to remain in your life forever? Write some words when something really good happens in your life—from seeing a hummingbird to remembering a funny joke a friend told you.

Start your Joy List now. Write at least two or three things that have given you joy recently. Or, do as my aged cousin did and write a list of all the good things in life which you would like to see go on forever and ever.

TYPE/ WRITE HERE

Lined writing area for the 'Joy List' activity.



## About the Author



In his more than 20 books and work as a newspaper editor, **Bill Zimmerman** has pioneered innovative writing techniques to help people express all the important things within them. His books and web sites are used in literacy and English Language Learning

programs around the world and to encourage creative thinking.

His web sites are: <http://www.billztreasurechest.com>, which features excerpts from all his books, <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com>, which enables visitors to create their own online comic strips, and <http://www.somethingtowriteabout.com>, his writing prompts blog for students. Please visit them.

### Among his popular books are:

- *Pocket Doodles for Kids*
- *Make Beliefs: A Gift for Your Imagination*
- *Lunch Box Letters: Writing Notes of Love and Encouragement to Your Children*
- *How to Tape Instant Oral Biographies*

## About the Illustrator



**Tom Bloom** is an artist who has brought joy to the world with his cartoons and illustrations which have appeared in many publications, such as *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Fortune* and *Barron's*. He has collaborated with Bill on many other books.

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