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MEMORY MAPS

Memoir was one of my favorite genres to teach in middle school writing classes. Memoir writing can offer opportunities for students to realize that even simple moments in their lives can be blown up into full-fledged stories simply by paying attention to that time period in their lives. When teaching memoirs, I often read sections from Gary Paulsen's book *How Angel Peterson Got His Name* (2003) because it is a perfect example of how a writer can expound on a certain period in their life. Plus, the story is hilarious and makes for an awesome read-aloud.

Memory Maps are like the Neighborhood Map I wrote about in *Write Now & Write On* (2022) yet differ because they discuss a specific memory in preparation for drafting of a memoir. It might be helpful if your students have some experience with the Neighborhood Maps before they move into Memory Maps, but it's not necessary.

While I used Neighborhood Maps as an icebreaker activity to get to know my students or to illustrate a particular character in a literary work or historical event, Memory Maps are useful to help students think through specific events in their lives and generate ideas and memories of the event. As a result, they are natural warmups when students are working on memoirs.

Putting It to Work

1. Begin by brainstorming a list of memories students have about specific events. For example, you might ask students to think about memorable celebrations, events at school, family vacations, sporting events, and so on.
2. Record this list for the class to see.
3. Show students some examples of maps. Ask students questions about them. For example, you might ask what the map is for, what information is typically included on maps, where might you see maps, and so on.
4. Model how to complete a Memory Map. Begin by choosing a memory of your own to draw about.

When to Use It

- When you want students to focus on a specific moment or event for writing.
- As a warmup for memoir writing.
- As a low-stakes brainstorming session.

Why It Works

- Because this strategy focuses mainly on pictorial images and representations, students are not bound by spelling, grammar, or sentence structure.
- It offers layers of communication and meaning: pictorial representation, oral retelling, and written words.
- There is no definitive final product; students can continue adding to their Memory Map indefinitely.
- It never has to move beyond this brainstorming/drafting stage if needed.

Modifications

- Have students work collaboratively with a partner to map out a classroom memory that they both shared.
- Instead of having students draw Memory Maps about themselves, have them map out a character's memory from a novel or a memory of historical figure.
- Working with a partner, have one student orally retell their memory while their partner draws the Memory Map. Switch roles.

Extensions

- Have students connect their Memory Maps to the Stretch to See on page 37.
- Encourage students to add sensory details to their Memory Maps.
- Use this strategy in tandem with the Neighborhood Map Activity (Harper, 2022).

Digital Direction

- Have students design a digital Memory Map using an application like Canva, PicCollage, or Pixpa.
- Use a digital drawing application like Sketchbook, Procreate, or iArtbook.

Quick Tip!

When working on the genre of memoir, it is helpful to begin priming the pump earlier with read alouds and other texts that might help students brainstorm ideas. Some of my favorites are:

- Jacqueline Woodson's *We Had a Picnic This Sunday Past*
- Eve Bunting's *The Memory String*
- Maribeth Boelts's *Those Shoes*
- Yangsook Choi's *The Name Jar*
- Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow's *Your Name Is a Song*

Lesson Lead-Ins

- Use this as a lead-in for memoir writing.
- Provide this as a warmup for descriptive writing.
- Connect this to culminating writings at the completion of a literary work. Use Memory Maps to recall different events in an extended work.

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