

## Telling Stories About Place

This handout is designed to help you think about public places you encounter in your everyday life, reflect on the stories we tell about those places, and understand where stories come from.

### Step 1: Pick a Public, Outdoor Space

First, pick a public place to engage with for this activity. A public place can be any space that is open to the public, even if it's not the first thing you think of when you think of "nature" or "the outdoors." It should be a place that you're somewhat familiar with, such as:

- A park you go to often
- The route, sidewalk, or street you take to school or work
- A public, outdoor place in your community where people gather
- A place you'd include on a map of where you live
- A patio at a coffee shop or restaurant
- An outdoor space at your school

For more writing activities, visit [writeout.nwp.org](http://writeout.nwp.org)

If it's possible, do this writing activity in your chosen place. Observe your surroundings and take inspiration from what you notice.

It's also okay to do this activity from your classroom or home—just make sure to choose a place you can picture well in your mind!

### Step 2: Consider the Stories About the Place

What narratives or stories do you know about this place? These might be obvious, or they might be more subtle. Ask yourself:

- What do people say about this place, if anything?
- Is this place considered a nice or good place to spend time? Why or why not?
- What is this place for?
- How would you describe this place to a person who had never been here?

The story could be as simple as "This is a path that is used by pedestrians to get from one place to another," or "This park is for children to play in."

# #writeout

## Step 3: Look Beyond the Story

After you identify a story about the place, reflect on where it comes from. What other filters could you see this place through?

Ask yourself:

- Who are the **people** telling this story? Think about their demographics, values, experiences, and beliefs.
- What is the **history** of this place? How do you think this place was created? What did it look like 5 years ago? 10? 50? 100? What events have happened here? Is this place ever in the news?
- What **purposes** is this place used for? Think about who this place is “for.” Who belongs here, and who does not? What are the rules in this place? Do people break the rules? Are there alternative purposes besides the most common ones?

## Extend the Project

If you have time, research the place online, and ask teachers, park rangers, friends, and neighbors about the place.

## Share Your Work!

Share your stories online using #writeout, or send them to the project curator, Charlotte, at [ckupsh@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:ckupsh@huskers.unl.edu)

## Step 4: Write It Down!

Using the brainstorming you’ve done already, write the story of this place:

- Describe the place, using lots of details, description, and imagery.
- Explain what common stories people tell about this place.
- Explore the other filters people might see this place through, keeping in mind the people, history, and purposes of the place. What other stories can we tell?
- Write about which story you like best. Why do you think you like this story?