

Person, Place and Thing Cups

This writing activity takes some brainstorming and preparation ahead of time. Fill a series of three Styrofoam (or whatever) cups with a series of suggested persons, places and things. Aim to have a minimum of five extra choices in each cup than the number of writers at a station (For example, if you have six kids sitting at a writing centre, then aim for 11 choices in each of the cups). The bigger the cups, the easier it is to mix up choices and allow eager hands to dig deep!

Each writer selects one choice from each cup, and then writes a story (or free writes) incorporating all three elements. This can be a timed writing (ie., take the next 15 minutes and write a story) or a character sketch (use your three pieces of information to design and introduce xxx to the world, a silly poem or a descriptive piece. If there are writers who are struggling with “what to do” with their choices, encourage them to brainstorm with their selections for few minutes prior to writing.

Simple Brainstorming could include:

Person	Place	Thing
<i>a cowboy</i>	<i>CN Tower</i>	<i>toothbrush</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• what is he/she wearing?• name?• age?• where did he/she grow up?• what does he/she look like?• what language does he/she speak?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• what time of day?• is it busy?• at the top or bottom?• why would the cowboy be there?• has the cowboy been there before?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• has the cowboy forgotten it?• is he/she looking to buy one and found the CN Tower by accident?• is he/she using it to clean something?• is it a weapon

Brainstorming is especially helpful for new or young writers, who aren't quite ready to trust their imaginations to tell a story. Have separate paper on hand and provide ample time, if need be, for writers to imagine and figure before writing.

Interestingly, often one of the three choices (the person, the place, or the thing) captures the writer's attention and tends to “drive” the story forward. Encourage young writers to think about each selection in term, and to decide what they believe will be the most influential part of the story: the character (person), the setting (place) or the prop (thing).