

## Shaping Up!

*A shape based writing activity focused on a shared memory.*

This is a fun activity that can be completed individually or in a group by family members: family members can each choose the same shape to develop on his/her own, or, can each choose different shapes to share individual memories independently. The key is to select a shape image that appeals most to the writer, so that he/she can explore memories, images, phrases, favourite words or feelings about that shape.

As a group:

- discuss what shape(s) appeal to you and why they do;
- share any memories, fun times or reasons for liking the image with one another;
- decide whether you will develop one shape-scape together, or if each of you will complete one on your own;
- think about how you will fill your selected shape: will you write a poem, develop a series of phrases, retell a story, or do something different?
- consider how the words and/or the story you choose to tell can take on the “shape” or your shape—for example:

I  
will  
never  
ever forget  
that Christmas  
Eve, the  
one when Dad  
decided to dress up as  
Santa and go down the chimney  
jingling bells and ho-ho-hoing and all  
and we had to  
call the fire department  
looking for help, almost going on  
midnight to come and help us rescue him  
up on top of our roof, stuck in the old brick chimney  
He still  
insists  
never  
again

Then, when you are all ready, spend some time writing and playing with your words within your chosen shape. Use pencil and encourage everyone to add words, phrases, ideas, or memories as you develop your rough draft. This is your brainstorming and development time, when you will all decide what you'd like to say about your shape and how you'd like to say it.

Afterward, review your shape writing together by having one or more members of the group read the musings inside the shape aloud (if one person wrote while other people shared ideas, then select someone different to read). What do people like? What do others want to change? Do some ideas seem more fun, more real, more “shape-like” than others? Play with the words in your shape and don't be afraid to move words around—or to erase them all together—in order to capture your collective shape memory.

In the end, you will have filled your chosen shape in whatever way you feel best captures the memory and feelings that shape has offered to your group: whether it is happy or sad, rhymed lines or a series of connected words but not phrases, the shape will help in defining your memory and making it that more real.

Always keep in mind that there is no “right” way to do this activity: what is important is to explore your families' ideas, share what you each remember about a particular shape or associated memory, and then look at how you can recreate that memory within the shape you are choosing.

*If there are no shapes that appeal to you in the ones available, think of an image or object that does contain special memory or meaning to you: are you comfortable “recreating” that shape in words, without an actual outline? If so, then do it!*