

## Prompt 7, Options A, B, or C

### Where I Worked, Where I Played, Whom I Loved

We begin with in-Class Writing, inspired by “The Meteorites” and “Maintenance Boy” and “The Mustangs”

Today we’ll write about a part-time job you’ve had, summer camp, or your time on a team, whichever feels richer, more potent, more memory-laden and juicy.

1. Who are the characters in your story that stand out? Who are the “lifers,” if that applies to your material? (See “Maintenance Boy” reference to the character, Jack. If you waited tables for a summer, who was there year-round? Name a few important people and do brief character descriptions that include what you knew of their background.

I.E., I was trained to wash dishes by Spike, a twenty-something white guy with a spider tattoo on his forearm, a passion for heavy metal bands like Dismember and Blood Red Throne, a possible prison record (although no one knew for sure), and an astounding aptitude for mental math. The story was that he lived with his mother and needed time off to take her for chemo, but we never met her.

My favorite camper was a girl called Riley, a small, freckled Portlander who wore a Buccaneers baseball cap, PJs covered with kangaroos, had a tendency to talk in her sleep, a mortal fear of snakes, and a passion for the water. She had to canoe, kayak, or swim during every free time or she thought she’d dry out like a parched plant.

The goalie was a potty-mouthed jokester named Tim, small but powerful, who was a perfect mimic and would replay the games later, on the bus ride home, complete with refs’ calls.

2. What did the main crew tend to argue about? This could be as simple as whose turn it was to clean out the coffee machine!
3. Give us the locale of where your story takes place and some geography specifics. If this place helps capture the spirit of the larger community, help us there. Then follow this prompt:  
*Our days were circumscribed by geography.* (See page 94 of “The Meteorites” where he creates a list of a day with sensory-rich settings.)
4. Try to characterize what kind of place it was, using details to cast judgments:  
i.e.—I washed dishes at one of those all-you-can-eat buffet places you can’t find these days, post-COVID. The kind of smorgasbord where the local football team went to bulk up. Or: I served chai at The Zone, in the historic part of Portsmouth, the coffee bar/ café where the paleo-eating and vegan-curious Lululemon-wearing moms gathered for a power snack after Pilates class.

Or: We were a team that had once been state champions—in 1963—and were still trying to regain the old glory days, but usually came in second last.

5. *My greatest fear was . . .* (see page 93 of “The Meteorites” for ideas)
6. *During one shift/afternoon/game I’ll never forget . . .* (go into a specific memory/scene)
7. *My arch-nemesis in this place was. . .*
8. *My favorite person/ or crush was . . .* (See “Maintenance Boy” and “The Meteorites” for ideas on how to render teenage love)
9. *Here’s what I learned.* (See the ending of “The Meteorites”)

#### Prompt 7

Option A: Where I Worked, Where I Played, Whom I Loved

Turn some (not all) of the material you generate above into a scene and fragment (at least 2-3 pages) for what could become Essay 2, Portrait of a Place, focused on one of these topics (a job, summer camp as job or camper, a sports team) that you are excited to write about. Try to include at least one amazing list, like the ones you see all over “The Meteorites.” It could even happen in the opening, as in his line: “The summer I was eighteen, hardly more than a child myself, I found myself ministering to a mob of boys, age four to six, who ran like deer, cried like infants, fought like cats, and cursed like stevedores.”

Option B: Hometown portrait.

After reading Hanif Abdurraqib’s “The Vanishing Monuments of Columbus, Ohio” for homework, write a portrait of your hometown focusing on landmarks that the public knows about, and the ones that YOU care about (like a certain farmers’ market, mall, river walk, pizza hangout, etc.). In other words, use Prompt 7 as a way to start writing about where you grew up, but find an angle to take us in rather than to try to say everything you can say about this place.

If you want to do some comic generalizing, you can start with this line from Bill Bryson, from *The Lost Continent*:

*I come from De Moines. Somebody had to. When you come from De Moines, you . . .*

(And replace this obviously with your hometown and use this prompt as an opportunity to critique this place with gusto, and a sense of humor, but love too.)

Option C: Sheltered-in-Place

Write a portrait of life during lockdown at home, giving us a strong sense of place and a depiction of your community and important characters.

**To be clear:** You will do all the first mini-prompts (1-9) during class (assuming we have time) and that is just writing for yourself that you don’t have to turn in. If you like it, you will turn it into Option 1 for homework. You are also welcome to do Option 2 or 3 for homework. One of these is your Prompt 7, due Monday.

Be sure to pick something juicy that you might want to expand into an essay.