

Commonplace book work, February 8-14

1. Digital commonplace book:

- Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, at some point during the day (you may want to set an alarm/reminder in your phone for this), take a picture of something ordinary and interest-catching (for *you*).
- Post this to your class Instagram account (remember to follow everyone else, including me—I'm @_kingdomofdaylight). You may notice that I post every day—this is because I will forget otherwise and because I'm really invested in seeing the view from my window change over time. You're welcome to do this but 3x/week is the requirement.
- Caption your image with the time, date, and location (be as precise or broad as you like). No other captioning here, please.
- On three of your peers' images, comment with a thought or observation related to *your own life*, interior or exterior, and the time and date. Try to comment on images that haven't yet had a comment. Your comment shouldn't relate to the content of the image.

We will continue the digital commonplace book all semester. Here are the thoughts that underlie it:

- It is a way to document and share our ordinary lives.
- It gives us an ongoing record of those lives that can provide detail for later writing/making.
- It offers a way to connect with one another outside of the classroom.

2. Paper commonplace book:

- This is a **seven-day** writing exercise. Repeat the same exercise **daily** between today and next Sunday. **If you miss a day, do not double up; just move on.**
- I find setting an alarm for the same time each day helps me build the habit (and actually enjoy this more—I get less stressed). Your mileage may vary.
- Doing this for seven days really gives you a chance to explore (and maybe even get tired of) the prompt.
- It is really important to try to do the (sometimes uncomfortable and difficult) thing of resisting the urge to interpret, narrate, situate. That is totally important and meaningful work—but it's not the work of this exercise.
- Do not worry about the result. Just spend the time.

Exercise (duration varies):

- Each day, write down three specific observations of objects or beings in your immediate surroundings.
- Note that "your immediate surroundings" go with you wherever you go!
- You can use any of your senses to observe—and this exercise is designed to help you sharpen all of them.
- Try not to use any figurative language (comparisons, metaphors, similes; idioms).
- Use declarative sentence forms: *There were six squirrels in the beech tree. My daughter slept on the red couch. The air was so cold I felt my skin react immediately.*
- Avoid introducing projection (telling us what things imply about your inner state), interpretation (telling us what things mean), narration (telling us how things relate to one another), or situation (telling us the bigger story or frame).
- This exercise is an exercise in description that requires you to access the muscles we use for plainness, directness, simplicity of language, clarity of vision. Those are muscles we will use over and over in this course, and they form a fundamental basis of observational writing.

3. Paper commonplace book outcomes:

- Before class on Monday (15 February), post 1-3 images from the week's work in your paper commonplace book, with a short caption reflecting on having made that work.
- Don't spend a ton of time on the caption—five minutes or so is *plenty*.

Commonplace book work, February 22-28

1. Digital commonplace book:

- Continue as per previous weeks. (See sheets from weeks 1 or 2 for specific instructions.)

2. Paper commonplace book:

- This is a **five-day** writing and drawing exercise. Repeat the exercises **five times** between today and next Sunday.
- Do the parts of this exercise in order, one after the other.
- I find setting an alarm for the same time each day helps me build the habit (and actually enjoy this more—I get less stressed). Your mileage may vary.
- Doing this five times gives you a chance to explore (and maybe even get tired of) the prompt.
- **Do not worry about the result. Just spend the time.**

Exercise (20 minutes x 5):

- Take a walk for at least ten minutes **in your neighborhood**. You can time this or not, but go for at least ten minutes. Keep your phone on silent for this so you have a period without its demands.
- As you walk, look at the buildings, pavement, trees and other plant life, signage, fencing, litter. Look at details; Look at what is "unimportant". Try not to look for "beauty" but instead just to pay attention to what *is*. Go slowly enough that you are seeing in detail: the point isn't just to move but to move and *see*.
- Are there things that draw your interest that you don't know the name of? Make a mental note or take a photograph.
- When you get back, set a timer for five minutes and do the following:
 - List the things you saw that you didn't know how to identify: "triangular roof part", "plant with red berries".
 - Use Google's Reverse Image Search and this [Illustrated Architecture Dictionary](#) (for parts of buildings) or iNaturalist (for plants, animals, fungi) to find out what to call the thing or being you observed.
 - Realize that you may not make it through your list in five minutes.
 - The goal of this part of your exercise is twofold: to begin to learn the names of things around you you might have overlooked/you don't know the names of, and to begin to understand research as a process that is *integral* to, rather than separate from, your firsthand, lived experience of the world.
- When the timer goes off, set it again for five minutes.
 - This time, just write reflectively about **the experience of walking and looking, and the specific experience of encountering whatever it was that drew your curiosity** (=not-knowing) **today**.
 - To write reflectively may mean asking yourself questions about how it felt, what it meant, why you did what you did, and then waiting to find the answer under the answer.

3. Paper commonplace book outcomes:

- Before class on Monday (1 March), post 1-3 images from the week's work in your paper commonplace book, with a short caption reflecting on having made that work.
- Don't spend a ton of time on the caption—five minutes or so is *plenty*.

Commonplace book work, April 12 - 18

1. Digital commonplace book:

- Continue as per previous weeks. (See sheets from weeks 1 or 2 for specific instructions.)

2. Paper commonplace book:

- This is a **five-day** drawing and looking exercise with **two variations**. Repeat the exercises **five times** between April 12-18.
- I find setting an alarm for the same time each day helps me build the habit (and actually enjoy this more—I get less stressed). Your mileage may vary.
- Doing this five times gives you a chance to explore (and maybe even get tired of) the prompt.
- **Do not worry about the result. Just spend the time.**

Exercise (20 minutes x 5):

- **On "A" days (Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday):** Set a timer for ten minutes. Turn off notifications and sound on your phone so you can work with focus.
- Go outside. Walk around in your yard or neighborhood. Look at the plants and gather specimens: a leaf, a flower, a little branch, a piece of lichen that's fallen from a branch...
- When your timer goes off, go inside, set another ten-minute timer, lay your specimens out in front of you, and draw one as completely as possible, using color.
- **On "B" days (Wednesday, Friday, Sunday):** Set a timer for ten minutes. Turn off notifications and sound on your phone so you can work with focus.
- Look at this guide to wildflowers of New York State: <https://www.esf.edu/restorewildflowers/NYS%20Wildflower%20Identification%20Guide.pdf>.
- Choose one wildflower and look it up online. The Wikipedia entry is a good place to start. Write down its scientific and common names, any interesting facts, blooming times, habit, etc. in your commonplace book.
- When your timer goes off, set another ten-minute timer, and draw a careful rendering of the flower you have chosen, using source images from the internet.

3. Paper commonplace book outcomes:

- Before class on Monday (**19** April), post 1-3 images from the week's work in your paper commonplace book, with a short caption reflecting on having made that work.
- Don't spend a ton of time on the caption—five minutes or so is *plenty*.