

## ***Telling Your Stories of the Sea*** **Ideas and Tips for Writers**

The Sea Stories Project wants to help you share your experiences, adventures, knowledge, and love of the sea with your colleagues, friends, and the world. If you already know exactly what you want to write about, and are confident about putting your ideas down on paper, you don't need this sheet – just start writing! But if you're less certain about how to do this kind of writing, here are some suggestions to help you get going: (I) Choosing a Place or Experience; (II) Refreshing Your Memories; and (III) Tips for Writing Your Story. These ideas are intended to be helpful and thought-provoking, not to limit or restrict how you choose to write – there's no right or wrong way to do this, feel free to go with whatever ideas or approaches seem most interesting and compelling to you! You might want to use a notebook or journal to write down your ideas, memories, and questions, all of which you can then refer to as you write your essay. Most important, we invite you to use the process of remembering and writing about your powerful experiences of the sea as an opportunity to learn more about the ocean and its life, and to strengthen your love for it – and to share that knowledge and love with the world.

### ***I. What Should I Write About? Choosing a Place or Experience***

Relax, take a breath, imagine the smell of salt air and the cries of gulls, and dive into your memories of the sea ... How has the sea touched your life? Of all the world's oceans, what places are most important to you, on coast, reef, or waves? When and how have you encountered these places, and how have those experiences stayed in your mind and heart since then? As you sink deeper into your memories, a number of different experiences and places may emerge:

- ✦ *Family Currents*: Historical reflections on your family's engagement with the oceans over time
- ✦ *Waves of Childhood*: Memorable experiences from your early years
- ✦ *Diving In*: Stories of exploration and adventure, close at hand or far away
- ✦ *Home Waters*: Observations and reflections on your present connections with the sea
- ✦ *Fish Tales*: Reflections on the sea's bounty as food and as livelihood
- ✦ *Seas of Struggle*: Confrontations with the ocean's power or destructiveness
- ✦ *Deep Calling unto Deep*: Ethical and spiritual encounters with oceans
- ✦ *Pooling Our Knowledge*: Your observations of ocean ecology, change, and threat over time
- ✦ *Sea Changes*: Stories of action in defense of the oceans and its inhabitants

Take as much time as you want to sift through these various experiences and places ... feel the depth and richness of your lifelong relationship with the sea. As you do so, perhaps one memory will call to you with special urgency, an important story waiting to be told – listen to that pull within you, and follow it. Or, if no specific place or experience jumps out at you, you may want to step back a bit and ask, "Of the places on coast or sea that I know, which is most important to me? Which deserves to have its story told? Which is in most need of care or protection – and might my story help?"

### ***II. What Do I Want to Say? Refreshing Your Memories***

When you've chosen what you want to write about, take some time to reflect upon and explore your place in more detail – through memory, research, or by actually going there for a visit (or perhaps all three). You may find any of the following questions or approaches helpful in these explorations; again, you're under no obligation to follow any of these suggestions, just go with whatever seems most interesting to you!

1. *Mapping your place*: In your mind or on a sheet of paper, make a map of your place. What are the boundaries of the place? What landmarks or major objects define the place? What other, smaller objects are important to you? How did you first get to that place? Where is it in relation to your home at the time – and, to your present home?
2. *Opening your senses*: Explore your place through as many senses as you can: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. How exactly would you describe the colors of water, sky, sand, or rock? How do these objects move, or how do they stand still? What sounds come to you, from wind, waves, birds, or other sources? What smells surround and fill you? If you're mainly aware of the salt air, try to pinpoint exactly how that smells in that particular place; and pay attention too to other, less obvious smells – hot sand, perhaps, or the breeze wafting in from inland, the smells of engines and gasoline, the scent of your own body as your salty sweat meets its sister in the sea. How do these sights and sounds and smells change at different times of day or night, or in different seasons? Feel in your hands, feet, and skin the different textures and temperatures of the sea – rough and slippery, wet and dry, hot and cold – and the fine gradations and qualities of wetness, the differing strengths or brittleness of different kinds of rock. Lift your hand to your mouth, and take in the tastes of the sea. What images and emotions do these varied textures and sensations evoke in you? Opening your senses can often lead you into deeper layers of memory – go where your feelings lead you!

3. *Remembering your stories:* What has happened in this place, the times that you have been there? Especially if you have stories from the past, you may find it helpful to begin by remembering what you were like at the time you first visited that place – what age you were, what you looked like, what you were wearing, how you felt in your body at that age. With what strengths and skills of body and mind did you encounter that place, explore it, take it in? If you were with other people, who were they, and how did they affect your experience? In that initial encounter or later visits, what have you observed of the other-than-human inhabitants of the place? How have you interacted with birds, fish, sea creatures, plants, or other living beings? What forces of nature have you seen at work there, in the sudden flash of a storm or the long, slow work of sun, salt, wind, and water? What human presences are apparent, with what effect on the place? How has the place affected you over time – what has it taught you about itself, yourself, or the wider world? How have you affected that place over time?
4. *Learning more about the ocean:* If you're not an expert, you may want to take some time to learn more about the history and ecology of your place, or of the sea in general, to make more sense of your particular experiences there. What was the place like ten, fifty, a hundred years ago? What human and ecological changes have taken place? If you're interested in particular species, find out more about their ways of life: Where do those birds fly in the winter? Where do those fish or whales migrate? How do those crabs survive in the heavy surf of a storm? What do all these beings eat, anyway? How have they been affected by human actions? You can learn about the history and ecology of your place by talking to knowledgeable people – scientists or guides at a local aquarium or nature center, or fishermen, seafarers, elders, or others in the community – or by doing research in books or on the internet. You can also talk with family or friends about their experiences of your place or of the sea in general, and add their knowledge, insight, and experiences to your own. Do other people care about these places or species as much as you do?

### ***III. How Do I Tell My Story? Tips for Writing***

Now that you've thought more about your place or experience, you probably have come up with a lot of memories, stories, and information about it. In order to write an essay, though, you need to step back and to choose what you think is **most** important about the place and your experiences there. You won't be able to share everything about your place in your writing – what do you **most** want to tell the world about the sea and what it means to you? What particular information, experiences, insights and concerns seem most interesting and important to you? At minimum, somewhere in your story you'll probably want to include some general information about the place – where it is, how you got there, some of the major landmarks to or in it – though if you want to keep the place secret, you can do that too! You also should try to include some detailed description of one or two specific aspects of the place – the particular kind of coast it is, the particular color and character of the waters, how it looks from a particular vantage point or at a particular time, description of particular birds or sea creatures you've encountered there, etc. – sensuous, vivid, concrete details will make your writing come alive for the reader. Finally, telling a story or two of your own experiences there, and the effect that those experiences had on you, will help your reader feel a more personal connection to your place and to the sea in general.

You might want to start by writing down a list of the most important things that you want to include in your essay. Then, think about how to arrange your ideas and stories in a way that makes sense to you, with a beginning, middle, and end. Do you want to start off by painting a general picture of the whole place? Or maybe it would be better to begin with a detailed description of a particular spot within the place, or a favorite species or interesting phenomenon that you have observed there? Or perhaps you'd like to start by telling the story of the first time you went there – or, what struck you as new the last time you visited the place? Any of those approaches – or others – could work! After you've started, what other information or stories do you want to include? What details do you need to tell us in order to convey what is interesting and important about that place and its inhabitants? How can you conclude your essay in a way that really lets us know what that place or species – or the ocean in general – means to you?

After you've written your essay, you'll probably want to go back over it and edit or change parts of it. Did you start off in a way that will make sense to someone who hasn't been to your place? Have you given enough information so that people will be able to follow your story and appreciate your place? If you've forgotten something important, where should you put it in? If you've repeated information or stories, do you want to take out the repetition? Have you chosen the most precise and evocative words to convey the colors, sounds, smells, and feelings of your place?

As you write, you might find it helpful to talk to friends, family, colleagues, teachers, or others – to share your excitement about the sea, to help you remember details of your experiences, to learn more about your place or about ocean ecology in general, or for advice on your writing. When you're done, show your essay to other people who might be interested, and see what they think of it. And be sure to **go back to the place after you're done** – does the sea seem any different to you after you've spent time thinking and writing about it? How can you better appreciate and care for this place in the future?