**Week 2 - Show Don’t Tell**

A part of engaging your reader is recreating a feeling, describing your internal and external world. How do we do that? Vivid description and detail are essential for recreating scenes and a part of the challenge for the writer is memory. This week we focus on objects and places in order to translate our abstract ideas of science and religion into relatable details. After week 1, you have hopefully answered some essential questions like what’s your story and what’s at stake? We’re now going to help put together the building blocks of your story, starting with detail.

**Using the 5 senses**

Often, as a reader we want to get lost in the story. For better or worse, we might want to experience the story as it is told. This is usually made possible through vivid detail and imagery. For example, in this excerpt from Heather Shaw’s **Monsters at the Center of the Earth**

***A Daughter’s Search for Faith Lost after Her Father’s Death*:**

I accepted Christ when I was eight years old, during the Easter cantata, a dramatic retelling of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection featuring a full orchestra and choir, a real donkey and palm fronds. I watched them nail Jesus to the cross, each pound of the spike accentuated by strobe lights and bass drums. When they lifted him into the air and dropped the cross into position at center stage, I stood up from the pew. Stage blood dripped from the crown of thorns. I was transfixed by the triangular depression under Jesus’s ribs as he gasped for air, the way his skin tightened over the bones with each breath. Sorrow welled up from a newly bored hole—it was my first encounter with death.

Here, we can imagine seeing through the eyes of an 8 year old. We can hear the sounds of an orchestra and choir, we can see lights and hear drums. There is the additional image of Christ on a crucifix, his body, the image of blood which we imagine as red. What follows (and is not included here) is brief dialogue, which adds to how we experience life in real time.

To help you reconstruct a scene, if you want to be sure to have enough detail, try and write out a list: sight, sound, smell, feel, taste. Next to each one, write the description of each that you can remember in order to put it all together. Sometimes, we read something that might be missing some detail or telling detail. This list can help us be more specific with our details.

**Writing prompts (Rules for prompts: Do NOT edit while you’re writing. Do not stop writing until the timer is up. Allow yourself to write freely and without restrictions. You might veer off topic and end up in a different place; that’s OK. Just WRITE.)**

**Objects, pictures, places**

How do you understand your own relationship with “concrete objects”? Do you hold onto things for sentimental reasons? Nostalgia, perhaps a favorite cup or article of clothing, something that you like to keep in order to revisit the past. Dig into how these objects make you feel. Can you hear that dress rustle? Can you feel the texture of your lucky tie? Can you smell the material from which that object is made? Can you taste your favorite dish? The one you ate the day that picture was taken.

1. Set a timer for 11min and write about your first experience with religion. Remember, do not edit while you’re writing. Do not stop until the 11min are up.
2. Now do this again but write about what you think of when you think about science.
3. Take an object that is meaningful to you in relation to science or religion, set a timer for 10min and write about the object using all of your senses.

FURTHER OPTIONAL PROMPTS

1. Find a picture that evokes a connection with science and/or religion. Maybe it’s you as a child at your First Communion, or with a relative that taught you about the cosmos. Looking at the picture, try to recreate the event/moment in time. Timer: 6min
2. Maybe you don’t have an object at home or a picture that you can dig up. Maybe it’s place that stirs in you all of the memories of discovery. Before you start to write, draw a map of this place. You don’t have to be an artist. It can be a very rudimentary map of a location. These prompts help you tap into memory and recreate places that you might not have thought of in a while. Once you draw the map, write a scene about this place. 10min

Example:

As an exercise with my writing group, we were asked to write about our first spiritual experience. It was a 10min prompt and I would end up revisiting it during my first TWP workshop experience. In many drafts, this was included:

San Lazaro stood in the corner of my parent's bedroom for years. Leaning on a crutch, holding a staff, a life size statue with sad eyes I used to look up into, candles at his feet, offerings maybe of candy or grains in hope or in thanks that prayers have been answered. He is old with sores and the two dogs by his side, looking up at him as well, kind of scared me, but I can picture who I was then: a little skinny girl, short brown curly hair, big eyes, hands on knees looking up fascinated, waiting for something to happen. I used to imagine I could see a tear, wanting to touch the eyes. On Sundays, my mother took us to church.

It was while working on this that I found a picture of this statue and of my parent’s bedroom. Suddenly, I could remember more vivid details like the placement of their dresser and other small statues. While this short paragraph was not included in my final draft, it was through prompts and exercises that I was able to dig deeper into my memories surrounding my experiences with religion. The revision process may be brutal, and you might have to cut out sections you love, but the goal is to have something to work with and expand on.