

Engaging our Historical Imagination in Place-Based Writing

“Historical imagination “ refers to our “ability to visualize something not currently present to our senses but that has been present at one time” (Staley 2021). When we engage our historical imagination about a place, we are using what we know and what we can experience to infer what the past might have been like.

Steps

Notes

① Pick a place to sit outside.

Look for a spot that feels comfortable and has a good view of your surroundings.

② What do you know about this place?

Where are you? What is nearby? How long has this place (in its current use) been here? What was here before? How did this place used to be used? What people used to be here?

(If you need to do a tiny bit of research, that's okay!)

③ Use your senses to list the characteristics of this place today.

What do you see? What do you notice? Think about the places and people you see, but also think about the colors you observe, the textures you experience.

④ Pick a time in history. Use your historical imagination to jot down the likely characteristics of this same place in the past.

What would be the same? What would be different? What would you see? Hear? Smell? What do you know about history that might inform your imagination?

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Use your notes to write! How has **this** place sustained people and communities over time? How has it changed and how has it remained steadfast? What does your historical imagination allow you to see?