

writing to water

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: To develop confidence in writing and creative expression, and to critically explore the relationship between people, places and the environment.

VIDEO:



The Age of Stupid (New-Zealand) Peter Donnelly is a sand artist whose ephemeral work on the beach speaks to the foolishness of living too close to the shore.

KEYWORDS:

geography, identity, oral history, personal narrative, voice, aesthetics, art, economy, creative expression, memory, landscape

ACTIVITIES:

These activities lead students through a sequential series of writing prompts that invite them to reconnect with and elaborate on a significant water site from their past. The writing exercise prepares them for critical engagement with “The Age of Stupid” video.

The first step asks students to work individually and to think about water, memory, landscapes and identity. The second step gets students to make connections between their experiences and the larger context of a changing environment.

Individual prompt sequence

- List five bodies of water you know well. (3 min)
- Choose one of special importance; describe it. (5 min)
- Keep describing it: what does it smell like, what sounds happen there, what does it feel like? (5 more min)
- Describe a scene from a memory bound to that particular place. How old are you? What are you doing? Why are you there? What do you see? How do you feel? Who is with you? (10 minutes)
- Make a connection between that scene and something happening now in your life. Write about it. (5 minutes)
- Keep writing. (2 minutes)

Group prompt sequence

- Watch “The Age of Stupid”
- Form small groups and discuss. (10 min)
- Offer a guiding question, depending on the class focus: eg. How does repetition function in producing identity here? How does landscape function in producing identity here? Encourage students to make connections between the video and the individual writing produced in sequence A. (10 min)
- Facilitate a group discussion. What did students find? List key ideas and help students draw out and refine them. End by highlighting the main teaching goal. (15 min)
- Allow 7-10 minutes at end of class for students to note key information or ideas they’d like to remember from the discussion.

READINGS:

Geography and Identity:

Leslie Marmon Silko, “Landscape, History and the Pueblo Imagination”

Oral History and Voice:

Northern Alaska Sea Ice Project Jukebox (jukebox.uaf.edu/site7/seaic)

Creative Nonfiction and Voice as Political Act

Greta Gaard, “Explosion” or Andrew O’Hagan, “After Hurricane Katrina”

Composition:

Rebecca Solnit “The Blue of Distance”

Art History and Everyday Aesthetics:

Peggy Phelan, “The Ontology of Performance”

Capitalism and Climate Change:

Naomi Klein, extracts of *The Shock Doctrine* (2007) or *This Changes Everything* (2014)