

Mosaic: Our Characters in
the World



Mosaic: Our Characters in the World –
Writing Prompts

"We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic," Jimmy Carter writes of the U.S. "Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams." This session is about honoring an intention of authenticity in writing outside our own cultural identity. We might get it wrong in this politically charged terrain of race and class. But begin to imagine. Our focus is on the deep intention of authenticity grounded in the craft of fine writing. Below are some writing prompts to begin to explore writing within the mosaic of cultures.

1. Write down the year your novel is set. Brainstorm three events happening in other cultures of the world that are happening in this year. The events could be happening in the U.S.
2. Write down three threads that run through your novel in progress. Imagine: Can backstory linking a story thread to an outside event in the world serve your story? Could it be a mirror for emotion building in your novel?
3. Write about a keepsake a character saved from a chance encounter (or a chance awareness) with someone of another culture.
4. Make up a journal in which two characters write and/or draw separately about a point of great importance to them. Explore their intimate thoughts. Do they contrast or are there commonalities?
5. Quick free write: describe one character from the point of view of someone outside that character's culture.
6. List three ways you are different from a character outside your culture. List three ways you are similar to the character.

7. Go on an observation walk in an area you can draw on for details of the novel's setting. In a notebook, write down clues – scents, objects, shop names, sounds, foods, language, the natural world - to the people who live there.
8. Brainstorm: In your life or in your family or among your best friends you've had in your life, brainstorm a connection, a fragment of a story someone told you that relates to a country or a culture not your own.
9. Journal entry exercise: this is borrowed from Kim Stafford who borrowed it from Dorothy Wordsworth, William's sister. "Every night I would write one sentence about what was happening outside in the world and one sentence about what was happening inside my heart." Keep a journal for your character, writing an inside and an outside line. Interpret the words *inside* and *outside* in any way that serves your story.
10. Write or rewrite one scene of your novel in which a character who is not your main character is of another culture. Just imagine. Does this experiment serve your story in any way?

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