

Essay 1—A Presentation of Place

Write a one to two page (250-600 words) essay in classic style that describes, evokes the essence of, and presents the significance of a particular place.

This essay will work best if you pick a slightly exotic location, a place slightly removed from your everyday experience, a vacation spot for example.

Incorporate not only lots of specific, observational details but also information about the place that will help you convey its significance to your readers. You might, for example, discuss: its history; its inhabitants; the responses of people who see the place for the first time or of those who live and work there; information about its founding, its changing fortunes, or its decline.

Think of yourself as a tour guide, pointing out all the interesting features of the place to your reader. The more specific and concrete your essay, the better.

Organize your paper around a thesis. Do not simply list random details. For example, you might have a section on appearance and one on significance. Or you might organize your essay spatially, like a physical tour of the place.

Write your presentation in classic prose style: clear and concise, specific and engaging.

Make every word count.

Initial Draft Due: September 12

(Bring THREE copies of your essay to class.)

Revised Draft Due: September 22

(Bring your Revised Draft, your Initial Draft with my comments on it, and all the Peer Critiques you received to class in a folder.)

Hollins Pond, from “Living Like Weasels”

By Annie Dillard

Twenty minutes from my house, through the woods by the quarry and across the highway, is Hollins Pond, a remarkable piece of shallowness, where I like to go at sunset and sit on a tree trunk. Hollins Pond is also called Murray’s Pond; it covers two acres of bottomland near Tinker Creek with six inches of water and six thousand lily pads. In winter, brown-and-white steers stand in the middle of it, merely dampening their hooves; from the distant shore they look like miracle itself, complete with miracle’s nonchalance. Now, in summer, the steers are gone. The water lilies have blossomed and spread to a green horizontal plane that is terra firma to plodding blackbirds, and tremulous ceiling to black leeches, crayfish, and carp.

This is, mind you, suburbia. It is a five-minute walk in three directions to rows of houses, though none is visible here. There’s a 55 mph highway at one end of the pond, and a nesting pair of wood ducks at the other. Under every bush is a muskrat hole or a beer can. The far end is an alternating series of fields and woods, fields and woods, threaded everywhere with motorcycle tracks—in whose bare clay wild turtles lay eggs.

My Neighborhood

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The condition of the neighborhood in which I grew up displays both desperate poverty and overflowing excess. The sunken houses, discolored by rain, have walls that sag like wet cardboard and ramshackle porches that the slightest breeze might collapse, killing the several youngsters and dogs playing underneath. Oddly enough, these poor families, who often can't afford shirts for their boys or hairpins for their girls, accumulate mountains of junk in their backyards: rusted wheelbarrows, scorched pots, broken swing sets, fleabitten sofas. It is as if, despite their poverty and the uselessness of their trashy possessions, the poor are still driven by the all-American instinct to acquire.

11800 Twinlakes Drive

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The hallway at 11800 Twinlakes Drives looks like the hallway of a mid-grade hotel. The lighting is always dim and the fixtures aren't fashionable at all but they aren't obtrusive. The walls are a very bland beige with textured blue wallpaper around the doorways. The wallpaper is edged by wood which is real, but with no particular polish or quality. Compounding this blandness is an unaesthetic cleanliness. The maids clean without thought to much of anything, including their paychecks, so while the place is never dirty it is never impressive, either. However, there is a large mirror across from the elevator which is good enough and useful since I only have a small mirror in my bathroom and never would know if there was a run in my stockings otherwise.

Guide To Inexpensive Hotels Of Europe

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Young, penniless American students have earned a reputation in Europe for seeking the cheapest and crudest accommodations. Most guidebooks designed for students present the basic, bottom-of-the-barrel picks among youth hostels, often neglecting the reasonably priced, comfortable hotels and pensions that remain vacant.

Amsterdam, The Bastion Hotel.

Holland's version of the Holiday Inn. The staff is tirelessly pleasant; their cheery demeanor would be unnerving if it were not a trademark of the Dutch. The hotel sits in the town of Bussum, about a twenty minute train ride from downtown Amsterdam. The Bastion's halls are painted black with purple doors and induce claustrophobia. The rooms themselves are decent and clean, with a television, telephone, and a small but predictably expensive mini-bar. The bathroom, included in the price of the room (60 guilder per night for a double), is spotless, but guests should be prepared to confront a shower that consists of a nozzle protruding from the wall, a flimsy plastic curtain, and a drain in the middle of the floor. Breakfast, too, is included, and the buffet is generous. Good for those looking to load up before a day packed with sightseeing.

Berlin, Pension von Oertzen

This family-owned pension sits about three blocks from the Ku'damm, Berlin's thriving commercial district, and about three yards from the city's most notorious strip joints and nudie bars. Inside, the high ceilings, polished wood staircases, and faded rose carpet muffle the noise and confusion that wafts up from the streets. Rooms are available with or without baths; those without are generally more spacious and comfortable. The tradeoff is a grimy, dimly lit communal bathroom with an occasionally functioning lock and a shower that emits sporadic bursts of hot water. The staff is eager to please, bordering on nosy, but guests planning only a brief visit will be left alone.

Reykjavik, The Scandic Hotel.

Recently, Iceland's government began a campaign to promote tourism, reflected in the arrangements made between the Scandic Hotel and the Keflavik International Airport. Upon arrival at the airport, travelers may board the "Flybus," whose final destination is Reykjavik, but which stops first at the Scandic Hotel. Weary and confused tourists disembark there, and conclude that the Scandic is the only decent hotel for miles. It is not; however, it is the only stop the "Flybus" makes early each morning as it shuttles travelers boarding connecting flights back to the airport. In spite of this underhanded maneuver, the Scandic is warm and welcoming, and is staffed by stunning young Icelanders fluent in several languages each. The rooms are standard and impersonal, yet spotless, and the hotel's gift shop displays thick handwoven sweaters of Icelandic wool.