

Option #4: A Place or Environment:

Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?

FIRST DRAFT

It is dark. It is a heavy blackness, but I know the way to my room. It is late at night, but how late I can't say. After a certain point, with no appointments, sunlight, or awake family members to inform me of the hour, time seems to lose its rhythm. I shut off the light in my room, climb into bed, reach to the right for my sketchbook, and then to the left for my reading lamp. I close my eyes and look into the deep darkness within me to let all the figures and images wake up. I sit up and rest my back against the wooden head of the bed. I pull my blanket over my torso but no further. I wait five, ten, twenty seconds to focus on one shape until it was animate and real. Then, I write down and underline my emotion [3] in the top right corner, put the date in the left, and begin to draw what I visualized. For example, I once wrote "Confusion," and tried to draw what this means to me visually. I would try to turn my feelings into pencil marks. I stay up, sometimes hours, drawing what I see and imagine.

My mattress is warm and soft. My back doesn't feel the burden of a shirt and my feet don't feel the burden of shoes. My eyes don't feel distracted, my ears aren't occupied, and my nose smells nothing. The silence that hums is meditative. My legs feel relaxed after a day of constant moving. My body feels tranquil, so I am able to concentrate on my thoughts.

The light of my lamp spreads out in a conical shape and then blends in with the darkness. The brightness extends no further than the width nor length of my bed. Darkness surrounds me and limits the space the light creates.[5] I feel like the bed is sided with four walls and a ceiling three feet above my mattress. It is a small, empty space. There are no people, and there are no gadgets. The limitation encourages me to think deeper; it's physical confinement actually leads to opening mental possibilities. It allows me to completely tune out of the world around me and to tune into myself.

I use only #2 Ticonderoga pencils on a three by three inch area of paper, to further limit myself. I want to analyze what these common things mean to me, and I do this by focusing in on very specific aspects of these things. [6] Since controlled environments are less active and diverse, my ideal environment is to remove as many components of the environment as possible. All I see are my grey blanket, blue walls, white page, yellow pencil, and my own skin.

Once I tried to visually convey how I understand the essences of letters. Letters are more than cogs in a sentence; I understand them as having distinct auras. To me, the letter "a" has a greenish yellow feel to it, it is soft and rounded, and it has other unique attributes. It, as a noun, has it's own characteristics. This time, I imagined each letter as being represented by a circle, shaded in with pencil. For all letters, I held the diameters of the circles to be the same, and I held the type of graphite I used to shade the circles in to be the same. For twenty six days in a row, I thought to myself: if I can understand this letter as being represented by a shaded circle with these constant conditions, how is the angle at which I shade this circle and the darkness with which I shade it representative of

this letter's essence? In this abstract exercise, I attempted to transcend the boundary between art and objects. I tried to understand something so deeply tied into clear articulation, letters, (as I would argue language is our most accurate and specific way of explaining and understanding the world) through the most personal and flexible mode of understanding (abstract art).

In sixth grade, I became enamored with Rube Goldberg and his kinetic sculptures, but much like abstract art, I felt they held no purpose. I wanted to create objects that maintain mechanical, artistic, simplistic beauty, but also improve life somehow. I settled on designing generators for the element that almost completely vitalizes our lives, electricity, because generators have both this beauty and application.

My first idea was an electricity-generating piano, much inspired by the jazz camp I attended at the time. The goal of this would ultimately be to prevent global warming and resolve human conflict over fossil fuels. But I wondered about the ethical grounds. If theoretically, this became a true source of electricity, then people would be forced to play piano. Additionally, people could just bang their forearms against the keys to create the same or more electricity, which would defeat the other purpose of making music. So I dropped this idea. I went through inventions like this night in and night out, sometimes through the morning, drawing and thinking.

The mental stretching gives me calm, and my stretching is most effective when it is isolated. The confinements that the darkness, my bed, and the nighttime impose are conducive to my most focused experimentation. They allow me to think about and understand the world differently. Paradoxically, isolating myself most from the world leads me to ponder my connection to it. It allows me to ponder how I can express ideas and phenomena in different ways. In my space of light, silence, comfort, and disconnection with time, I feel fresh, light, and sharp.

FINAL DRAFT

With no sunlight or awake family members to inform me of the hour, time seems to lose its rhythm. I push through the darkness to find my room and climb into bed, my torso freed from a shirt and my feet unburdened by sneakers. There are no people or screens; the humming silence is meditative. I reach to the right for my sketchbook and to the left for my lamp switch. The conical light illuminates my blanket, page and Ticonderoga pencil.

Sometimes I sketch what little I can see, such as my hands, or the banjo barely visible on the wall across from me. Usually, though, I begin by thinking. I close my eyes and conjure up images, and once they become vivid, I draw what I have visualized. The physical confinement encourages me to concentrate on my ideas and my drawing. Occasionally, I draw an abstract image that represents something tangible. Once, for 26 nights in a row, I tried to convey visually how I perceive the essence of each letter of the alphabet. Letters are more than cogs in words; I understand them as having distinct auras. For example, I picture the letter "a" as pale, soft, and modest. Each night I imagined a letter as a shaded circle of a certain diameter. I thought: within this template, what do the angle and darkness of my shading speak about the letter's essence? How can letters have identities outside their roles in the alphabet?

Although this exercise excited me, I felt a little uncomfortable pursuing it. It was the same feeling I had in sixth grade learning about Rube Goldberg's kinetic sculptures: the creations do not predictably bring others happiness. Jackson Pollock cannot know whether an audience will like his work, whereas William Austin Burt could assume that typewriter users were appreciative of his invention. While the value of great art is unpredictable, I wanted to experiment with creating objects that not only possessed mechanical and artistic beauty, but could also bring pleasure to others in a palpable way.

I began using my bedtime drawings to think up renewable energy generators. My first idea was an electricity-generating piano, but I quickly questioned the invention's ethical grounds. If, theoretically, it became a true source of electricity, then people would be forced to play their pianos. People might bang their forearms against the keys to create their electricity, which would defeat the true purpose of making music. Three drawing pads later, I started sketching designs for an electricity-generating floor tile. I didn't use rulers or Autocad, but reveled in the struggle to draw straight lines and perfect circles. My ambitions led me to assemble models during the day while I continued to ponder at night.

Last year, I could not resolve how to add bass to my band's sound: the instrument was too expensive to buy, and my band didn't want more players. One night, I began to design a simple bass. In my sketchbook, I drew the curves and the dimensions of an upright bass to my satisfaction. I made precise calculations for string length and added a ledge at the bottom so that the volume could be further amplified. After three months of visualizing the smooth body by night and crafting it by day, I plucked away at the strings and slid my hands down its neck while my band played a tune. Although some ideas turn out to be more useful than others, the creative process always gives me a feeling of euphoria.

The restrictions that the darkness, my bed, and the nighttime impose are conducive to my most focused experimentation. Isolating myself from the world leads me to ponder my connection to it. In my space of stillness and comfort, I feel light, sharp, and inspired.