

Personal Geography

by Susan Buttenwieser

Genre: Creative Nonfiction

Grades: 2-12, adult

Student needs: General ed and special ed

Common Core Learning Standards:

K-5 #3 and 7: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects.

6-12 # 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Workshop Objective: Lesson for innovative approach to personal history. It can also be used for nonfiction research as a tool for understanding the immigrant experience, Holocaust survivors, refugees, etc.

1. Warm up: Mini writing marathon.

Students will write for two minutes straight on the following topics (these can be adjusted depending on the students):

- list all the things you do before you get to school
- list the things you see on your way to school
- list 4 memories you have from childhood
- list 4 things you want to forget
- list 4 things you want to always remember
- list 3 big events that you have witnessed or that have happened to you

2. Talk about what maps are, and what they are used for. Look at the New York City subway map for an example. Also show examples from *You Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination* 2003 by Katharine Harmon, *My Map Book* by Sarah Fanelli, *The Walk to South School 1964-71* by John Fulford, and discuss.

3. Using their writing from warm up, students will make a personal map using art supplies as well. They can make a map of major events in their lives, a map of their walk to school, a map of their day, a map of where they live (including things that are no longer there), a map of things that are gone, etc. The maps can be a combination of words and drawings. They can also be made up of only words or only visuals.

Susan Buttenwieser is a prose writer and T&W teaching artist. To read more about Susan, go [here](#).