

MAP THE PERSONAL, CHART THE GLOBAL

Find the universal you. That slight aspect of your personality (or fantasy life, or hidden world) that you think so odd, so peculiar, so weird, that you've kept it a secret your entire life, is most likely far more common than you think. We're all made of similar stuff, we human beings. Even our most closely guarded insecurities are often commonly held, though most individuals keep these parts of themselves hidden...But writers are different. We *do* share. And along the way readers come to an understanding that we are all very much alike.

—Dinty Moore, “How to Bring your Voice to Life in Personal Essays”

This prompt involves mapping out the timeline of our pasts with community and global events that also occurred. Connecting our personal realities to the local or global experience of an era helps us investigate the many ways we are all connected and shared situations or circumstances. We're analyzing our universal selves while connecting the dots. The chart will likely contain items that need to be researched and filled in later. For now, we're simply make space for the information. Create a chart consisting of

- 4 COLUMNS
- 4 ROWS (or more, # of rows = # of decades in age to consider + 1 at top to label)

DECADE	PERSONAL EVENTS	LOCAL EVENTS	WORLD EVENTS
1-10			
11-20			
21-30			
31-40			

For example, mine is below.

DECADE	PERSONAL EVENTS	LOCAL EVENTS	WORLD EVENTS
1-10	Attended birthday parties, saw how other people lived, Nonna Femia died, Nonnon came to Canada for 3 years...	Mississauga train derailment	Jimmy Carter loses to Regan
11-20	Attended arts highschool, tried to survive my parents constant brawling, Mom diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, left home for university...	Canada's Wonderland opens, the Scarborough Rapist (Paul Bernardo)	Irpinia earthquake in Italy, John Lennon killed (didn't know who he was), Anwar Sadat assassinated, Tiananmen Square, Exxon-Valdez oil spill, Chernobyl
21-30	LotusLand years, met extended family, Uncle Rocco became my second dad, failed Creative Writing at uni, Fringe..	Brian Mulrooney & the GST on books (Douglas Street spontaneous news interview)	Princess Diana dies in car accident 1999: world population reaches 6 billion, Y2K worries

Continue creating charts and see what jostles your memories.



SOUNDTRACK OF YOUR LIFE

DECADE	FAVOURITE SONGS	FAVE MUSICIANS	GREATEST HITS	LEAST FAVE SONGS
1-10				
11-20				
21-30				

CHARACTERS WHO GOT YOU THROUGH A DIFFICULT TIME

DECADE	FAVOURITE FILMS & SHOWS	FAVE ACTORS & ACTRESSES	BLOCKBUSTERS	LEAST FAVE MOVIES, SHOWS, PERFORMERS
1-10				
11-20				
21-30				

STORIES THAT COMFORTED OR UNNERVED OR RESONATED WITH YOU

DECADE	FAVOURITE BOOKS	FAVOURITE WRITERS	BEST-SELLERS	LEAST FAVE
1-10				
11-20				
21-30				

In personal essays, nothing is more commonly met than the letter I...The problem with "I" is...that fledgling personal essayists may think they've said or conveyed more than they actually have with that one syllable. In their minds, that "I" is swarming with background and a lush, sticky past, and an almost too fatal specificity, whereas the reader, encountering it for the first time in a new piece, sees only a slender telephone pole standing in the sentence, trying to catch a few signals to send on. What "I" doesn't do, however, is give us a clear picture of who is speaking..."

—Phillip Lopate, "On the Necessity of Turning Oneself into a Character"

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QUESTIONS AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS for EACH DECADE:

1. Who did you spend most of your time with during the day? (List where and why, for example Sam, at work)
2. Who did you spend most of your out of school or off work time with in the evenings?
3. Where did you live? (What did you love or dislike about your home?)
4. Where did you work? (What was your income situation? Stressful, comfortable, provide examples of this.)
5. List the schools you attended.
 - Did you have a favourite class or subject?
 - Who taught you something you have never forgotten? How did they do it?
 - Did you go on any school trips to a museum, or historical place?
 - Did your school bring in guest speakers or have a career day?
 - What memories do you have of being in class? Lectures, teacher-student conversations, being singled out by an instructor for some reason?
 - What memories do you have of recess or outside of class time? (clubs, activities)
6. What holidays did you celebrate? (Where, how, who else was there? What food did you eat? Who prepared it? Is there a traditional recipe or meal?)
7. What smells do you associate with your childhood home? (comfort food, cologne, perfume, cleaning supplies, neighbourhood smells in the changing seasons)
8. What did you wear or use that followed fashion trends from that time? (ponchos, grunge, goth, leg warmers, sweaters tied a certain way.)
9. What did you use or own that meant keeping up with technology? (cell phones, social media apps, other apps – uber, SkiptheDishes, airpods, instapots...)
10. Did you use any terms or expressions that were popular at the time? (“You can’t handle the truth!” “Sick” “Gnarly” – Internet search slang from that decade.)
11. Did you travel during that time to visit relatives? Did your family go on a vacation?
12. What activities did you start during that decade? (running, yoga, macrame, playing ukulele.)
13. What do you miss from that time? What are you glad is finished from that time?