

YWP WEEKLY CHALLENGES LIST

September-December 2023



This list includes each of YWP's three weekly challenges, Sept. 15 to Dec. 29. The January-June challenges will be posted on the site in late fall. Writers and artists may respond to any of the challenges any time, but those based in Vermont should follow the Friday deadlines to be considered for publication with our media partners – Burlington Free Press, VTDigger.org, Rutland Herald, and Barre-Montpelier Times Argus. All writing and visual art posted on the site – both responses to these challenges and general “Create” posts – will also be considered for publication in our monthly digital magazine, The Voice, and in our annual Anthology. Each week, the first two challenges are writing and the third is visual art. To view these challenges on the YWP website, go to youngwritersproject.org and click on Weekly Challenges.

WEEK 1

Due Sept. 15

Fly: It's human nature to want to listen in on conversations we know aren't meant for us, but every once in a while ... we can't resist! Write from the perspective of a human fly on the wall and observe a scene not meant for your eyes or ears. Is it funny, ridiculous, poignant, eye-opening? Describe it.

Affirmations: Affirmations are reassurances we give ourselves to self-soothe and bolster our confidence, often in the mornings or when times get tricky. Write a poem of affirmations to yourself, reminding yourself of your own best qualities.

Daydream: Doodle, draw, photograph, or paint a character whose head is in the clouds – literally or figuratively. If it's possible to work this into your vision, what are they dreaming about?

WEEK 2

Due Sept. 22

Adjectives: Write a short story or poem without using any adjectives: stripped down to the bare bones. Finding the right noun – instead of piles of adjectives – makes for great writing. Hint: It might help to start by using adjectives and then removing them afterward.

Nickname: Do you have a nickname, or have you ever given one to a friend or family member? What's the story behind it? If you don't have a nickname, but would like one, what would it be and why?

Inspired: Explore YWP's [Great Artists Challenge](#) or [Great Artists Archive](#) to find an artist who really speaks to you. Experiment with your own creations and share the name of the artist who inspired you.

WEEK 3

Due Sept. 29

30: Describe the way you imagine yourself and your life at age 30. Where will you live? What will you be doing, and what will you have accomplished? Do you expect your personality to change, or will you be much the same as today?

Never: “Never forget this moment, my child ...” Use this sentence at the beginning or end of a poem or story.

Song: Choose your favorite song and bring it to life in a photo or painting.

WEEK 4

Due Oct. 6

Certain: Make a list of five things you know for sure. You can start your list with the words, “This I know ...” or however you want. If your list is longer than five, keep it going. Your list can be humorous or serious.

Bigfoot: As it turns out, Bigfoot didn’t know humans existed either! How has he been spending his days? Is he the only one out there? Or are there entire pockets of “Bigfeet” folks spread throughout the dark forests of the world? Write a short news or feature story that catches us up with the latest on Bigfoot.

Look Up: Get down low and look up – way up – at tall buildings, towering trees, an expansive sky, whatever is nearby and deserves a new perspective from down below. Take photos!

WEEK 5

Due Oct. 13

Loop: Write a poem or story that loops perfectly. Your first two sentences should be the same as your last two.

Detective: Write about a day in the life of the world’s worst detective. What kind of shenanigans does our hapless sleuth get into? What’s the mystery this time? Does the detective’s bumbling way help solve the case? Have fun with it. Include plenty of description.

October Love: Take photos, draw, paint the glory of fall colors (special shout-out to those New England hillsides and forests.)

WEEK 6

Due Oct. 20

Immortal: The thought of living “forever” (however you define that word) would be a wild, incredible fantasy for some, and torture for others. What would it be for you, and why? Or could you imagine it as both incredible and terrifying? How would it play out for you?

Spiders: Develop a character who has a special bond with things that people are commonly afraid of, such as spiders, snakes, clowns, thunder. You might want to explore the origin story of this bond and where it leads the character. Or you might want to write an empathetic ode to spiders and snakes. Go wherever this challenge takes you.

Collage: Take a series of photographs of someone doing an activity involving their hands. It could be anything – writing, drawing, cooking, playing catch, blowing bubbles! Create a fun collage from the photos and post them on YWP.

WEEK 7

Due Oct. 27

Fourth: The fourth wall is the conceptual barrier between any fictional work and readers. Write a piece that breaks the fourth wall with a character who is aware of being fictional, and directly communicates to the reader.

Ghost: Goblins, ghouls, and ghosts. Tell us a Halloween story! Introduce us to your ghost! Imagine that he reluctantly shows up for his annual appointment on Halloween with all the other ghosts who want to scare the neighborhood, but he just doesn't have the heart for it. Maybe he's a little shy, a little clumsy, a little out of his depth, maybe he's good-humored, well-intentioned, and fond of you, a mortal. Take off from here or create your own ghostly character.

Costume: Have a creative costume for Halloween? Or a sketch of one you'd like to wear if you dared! Show us!

WEEK 8

Due Nov. 3

Quote: Share a favorite quote – something you found in a book spoken by someone you admire, maybe now safely scribbled in a notebook that you can return to forevermore? What is it about those words that has always stuck with you?

Ceremony: In prose or poetry, write about the ceremony involved in setting something free. You may interpret this spiritually or physically: releasing fireflies from a jar, giving a beloved pet a proper burial, opening the window for a trapped bird.

Postcard: Draw, photograph, or paint a postcard of your town, city, or state, featuring something iconic about the locale, such as a mountain, statue, building, or lake. If there's really nothing iconic about the place, focus on the familiar. What would immediately identify it for a friend or family member who knows it as well as you do. Maybe the old general store? Or a lone tree on a hill? Go exploring.

WEEK 9

Due Nov. 10

Butterfly: The butterfly effect is the idea that small things can have non-linear impacts on complex systems, with the example of a butterfly flapping its wings and causing a typhoon. Write about a tiny action that has a major impact.

Knight: A medieval knight is cursed and transported to the present day. Coincidentally, he happens to land in the middle of a modern Renaissance fair! What ensues?

Lines: Use a felt-tip marker or pen to create a line drawing, without picking up the pen. Aim for abstraction, rather than recognizable shapes, and enjoy the soothing process. Post your favorites!

WEEK 10

Due Nov. 17

Stranded: Imagine you're stranded on a deserted island. Apart from items and tools that would help you physically survive, what *three things* from your old life on the mainland would you want with you, and why?

Timeless: What would a world without clocks – without time measured by anything but the sun – feel like? Imagine how our lives would be different. Write a poem or story that captures a day in the life of a clockless world (or even just a few moments).

Troll: With Thomas Dambo's giant wooden troll sculpture to inspire you, create your own troll (*small is OK!*). Try to use recycled materials the way Dambo, a "recycle art activist" from Denmark, does. [Thomas Dambo](#)'s art can be found in the most wonderful places – like this troll, Isak Heartstone, in Breckenridge, Colorado.

WEEK 11

Due Nov. 24

Brainstorm: Tell a character-driven story. You could start by thinking of your favorite books and movies, fiction and nonfiction. Why do the storylines grip you? What do you like about the characters? The answers to these questions might help you create your own captivating story. Brainstorm with these prompts: *I am fascinated by people who ...* Or if you already have characters in mind, *I am fascinated that my character ...*

Imaginary: A childhood friend you haven't seen in years surprises you at your front door with a great, big, bear hug. "Long time, no see!" The thing is, your friend was imaginary. Where does the story go from here?

Face: Try sketching the face of someone you love, in-person or from a photograph. You can follow facial proportion guidelines or go freestyle. Play on the characteristics or expressions that make your person's face unique. Use any medium, post your finished piece on YWP – and consider giving your art as a gift of appreciation to the special person.

WEEK 12

Due Dec. 1

Hygge: Hygge, loosely translated, is a Danish word meant to describe a feeling of comfort, contentment, and coziness. Write about a person, place, or experience that produces this feeling in you. (*Fun fact: There is no equivalent word in the English language.*)

Haiku: Experience this moment right now. Share it with us in haiku. The traditional Japanese form of poetry generally has these qualities:

- 17 syllables in three lines of 5/7/5 syllables;
- A theme of nature and might allude to the seasons;
- Written in the present tense about the present moment.

Pet Portrait: Draw, paint, or photograph a pet in a way that shows off their endearing idiosyncrasies.

WEEK 13

Due Dec. 8

Peacock: Tell the story of a peacock that feels like it was born into the wrong family. This one's quiet and a little self-conscious. How does it manage among its strutting, fancy-plumed siblings and peers?

Blizzard: Well, it finally happens: The old car breaks down on the way home from school. And now the two of you are out here in this blizzard. Your companion could be a longtime friend or a new acquaintance. What do you talk about while you wait – and hope – for a tow truck to arrive?

Red: Focus on the color red. Show how it pops against a white or muted gray background– from the red cardinal to the red velvet Santa hat. Share your photos of red, wherever you find it.

WEEK 14

Due Dec. 15

Traditions: Do you have special holiday traditions, conventional or unconventional, that you and your family or friends observe every year? How did they originate? Why are they important to you? Tell us about them.

Dialogue: Write a story or poem told only through dialogue – an involved, back-and-forth conversation between two characters. Skip the “he said/she said/we said/they said” attribution. Just the dialogue!

Contrast: Tonal contrast – the difference between the brightest highlight and the darkest low-light – can make dramatic photos. Try taking black and white photos of objects using high contrast lighting – the whitest whites and the darkest blacks all contained in one space.

WEEK 15

Due Dec. 22

Gather: “Gather ‘round the fireplace, kids,” Grandpa said. “It’s time I told you a tale my own grandfather told me long ago on a winter night just like this ...” Try your hand at writing a story within a story.

Cynic: Write from the point of view of a cynical or pessimistic character who realizes they have something to celebrate after all. Does someone or something make them change their perspective?

Bird’s-eye: Use Google Earth to find your home, school, or another place you like to spend time in. Make your own abstract version of the bird’s-eye view image, in any medium.

WEEK 16

Due Dec. 29

Should’ve: For every “I shouldn’t have said that” in life, you’ll twice say, “I should have, while I had the chance.” Write about a character reminiscing about something they should have said or done, and how differently their life might have turned out if they had. Write about yourself if you prefer.

Acquiesce: To *acquiesce* is to accept, agree, or allow something to happen – essentially, to give in – by staying silent or by not arguing. Through poetry or prose, explore a memory of your own acquiescence. Would you do things differently now? Or maybe you’ve come to accept that it was the right thing to do at the time. Write about it.

Transformation: Allow the word “transformation” to inspire you to create something new. It could refer to a new year, the changing of the seasons, or to a bright, new chapter of someone’s life ... anywhere you wish to take it, in any medium.

Questions? Please contact Susan Reid, YWP executive director at sreid@youngwritersproject.org.