20 in 20

This exercise was originally intended as a way to have students brainstorm writing ideas. The goal is to show students who don’t think they have anything to write about that they do actually have plenty of ideas, experiences, and things that they care enough about to write about. However, it also makes an excellent getting to know you activity for the first day of class. While this is especially appropriate in a Language Arts class, it could be used in any class to have students think about things they want to share about themselves in any class.

The exercise consists of 4 rounds of structured brainstorming, with each round taking no more than 5 minutes. If used as a getting to know you activity, you can have students share out after each round, or at the end.

Ask the students to take out a piece of paper and something to write with.

1. Round 1 - People
   1. Ask the students to write the title “People.”
   2. Ask the students to write the numbers 1 through 5.
   3. Explain that they will have 1 minute to write down the names of five people who have been important to them in their lives.
   4. Give them 60 seconds to do this.
   5. Explain that they will have 4 more minutes to write a few words, no more than a sentence, next to each name. Whatever comes to mind is fine. If you want to give examples, they might be, “He taught me to ride a bike,” or “Gone too soon.”
   6. Give them 4 minutes to do this.
   7. Optional – ask for volunteers to share one or more thoughts.
2. Round 2 – Places
   1. Ask the students to write the title “Places.”
   2. Ask the students to write the numbers 1 through 5.
   3. Explain that they will have 1 minute to write down the names of five places that are important to them. This could be a room, a house, a city, or even a place they’ve never been
   4. Give them 60 seconds to do this.
   5. Explain that they will have 4 more minutes to write a few words, no more than a sentence, next to each place. Whatever comes to mind is fine. If you want to give examples, they might be, “That’s where I had my first kiss,” or “Someday I’ll get there.”
   6. Give them 4 minutes to do this.
   7. Optional – ask for volunteers to share one or more thoughts.
3. Round 3 – I believe
   1. Ask the students to write the title “I believe.”
   2. Ask the students to write the numbers 1 through 5.
   3. Explain that they will have 5 minutes to write down five things that they believe to be true about the world. These don’t need to be grand statements, just things that they are sure are true or important. If you want to give examples, they might be, “I believe in being loyal to my friends,” or “I believe in the power of nature.”
   4. Give them 5 minutes to do this.
   5. Optional – ask for volunteers to share one or more thoughts.
4. Round 4 – Someday
   1. Ask the students to write the title “Someday.”
   2. Ask the students to write the numbers 1 through 5.
   3. Explain that they will have 5 minutes to write down five things that they will do at some point in their lives. If you want to give examples, they might be “Someday I will visit Asia,” or “Someday I will get married.”
   4. Give them 5 minutes to do this.
   5. Optional – ask for volunteers to share one or more thoughts.