



IN YOUR SHOES: A LITERARY ADVENTURE (How far are you willing to go... in your imagination?)

Franz Kafka wrote *Amerika*, a novel set entirely in the US of A, with details of the experiences of his relatives who had emigrated there. Here's the catch: Franz has never set foot in America! Saul Bellow (*Henderson the Rain King*, set in Africa). Shakespeare! With his plays set in Italy. William Saroyan once did a whole travel piece for a magazine about Mexico City; when asked if had visited there, he said, "You asked me to write about Mexico City. You didn't say I had to go there."

Why, on Earth, have these writers done this?

One of the greatest joys of being a fiction writer is to be able to go anywhere in time and place. And to be anyone. Some writers create whole new *worlds* they have never set foot in (think of the Wizarding World in Harry Potter that sprang purely from Rowling's imagination). Some writers of historical fiction jump completely back in time!

Why do they do that?

In order to find out, for today's session, we are going to be...

Getting into someone else's shoes and travelling... solely in our imagination!

Group Exercise (Warm-Up): Duration: 30 Minutes

Split into pairs. Each of you, take a minute to pick a place that you have visited before, which shall be the setting for your story/ poem/ article.

But here's the (by now, *very* expected) twist: Your partner will use this setting! To spice things up, make sure you pick a place your partner has never visited before.

Done? Good. Now, each of you spend the next twenty five minutes researching about this place, 'cause that will be where your story comes in!

Done? Okay, you are *fast*! Now, one or two of you. Quickly. Tell the other writers what you're most excited about, about this place you've got as your setting. But do NOT tell us which place it is!

Individual Exercise (Long Assignment): 1 Hour

You already know where I'm going with this:

Write a story/ poem/ scene/ article set in the place your partner's chosen for you.

Oh. And. Have fun!

*In case you're wondering how to start off the research, here's a few tips:

- Ask your partner as many questions as you'd like.
- Do a virtual tour of the place on Google Maps! You can figure out some route for your character(s) to take, look at local monuments and landmarks.
- YouTube some videos of the place you're interested. Or even better: travel bloggers. Hit the 'Gram. Or music from local singers on Spotify. Spend some time placing yourself in those locations and situations. When you're watching these videos, try to pay attention to the details in the *background*: what do the roads look like? What's the weather like? What do the people wear? What are they eating for lunch?
- Try to focus on the little things: for example, if you're picking a street in Hyderabad, you could mention the sounds of the *azaan* at sunset, the smell of freshly brewed Irani chai/ the sight of It brewing in large steel containers outside a chai shop, its vapours wafting towards you as you walk the street. Try to fill in authentic little details to make the place come alive.

*Caution: Try to avoid stereotypes of the people from their culture.

In the end, ask yourself: Why *do* we write about places we've never been to?

For homework: here's a cool discussion on the topic:
https://www.reddit.com/r/writing/comments/ar0vr8/writing_about_a_place_youve_never_been_to/