

Wonder Year Journal Prompts



Journal writing is a way to deepen how we think about the world around us and process the feelings within us. As a tool in our worldschooling toolbox, it can help capture and imprint our experiences. Dedicated time to journal is like an in-breath: it lets us pause, reflect and connect with our Wonder Year adventures—and with each other.

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Ideas to Get Kids Writing - Page 1 of 2

This list of prompts generally builds in complexity. Many could be done as family discussions if that format is more engaging for your children, especially younger kids who may need help with writing.

- Describe one character you met today. Get as detailed as you can.
- Freewrite on one major way this place is like home and one major way it is different from home.
- Name three things that surprised you today.
- What are all the delicious foods you ate today?
- What things about this place remind you of stories you have read?
- Describe the memorable sounds you heard today.
- Who are all the people you talked to today and who was most interesting to you?
- If you could be any of the historical figures we learned about today, who would you want to be? Is there anything you would do differently if you were that person?
- What was the most interesting fact you learned today and why did it impress you?
- What would your grandmother like most and least about this place?
- Would it be fun to be here with your best friend? Why or why not?
- Is there a difference between this city or country and your home? What is the same? Add examples.
- Write a restaurant review. Consider adding it to Yelp or Tripadvisor.
- Write a museum review. Add details about what ages would most enjoy the exhibits.
- Write a guide to the hike you did today. Offer it to your host or hostel owner to share with other travelers.
- Use an adjective to describe the following things you saw: art, transportation, food, architecture, people, music, fashion, history, weather (keep going depending on your place).
- Write a short story that helps you imagine more about the life of an interesting character you met--including how they live and what kind of person they might be.
- Observe and make notes on how local parents interact with their children.
- Make a list of things you would like to bring home with you from here. These could be works of art, food, ideas, phrases, or people. Then circle the ones you could actually bring home.
- Describe the funniest thing that happened today, or the worst, the most boring, the most fun, the most surprising.

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Ideas to Get Kids Writing - Page 2 of 2

This list of prompts generally builds in complexity. Many could be done as family discussions if that format is more engaging for your children, especially younger kids who may need help with writing.

- Interview the grown-ups you are traveling with about their trip experiences. Create questions and record the answers in a journal.
- List ten things that are different and ten that are similar about here versus home or another place you've visited, such as shopping for groceries, eating in a restaurant, or going to the doctor. (You can expand this to other comparisons between destinations.)
- Describe a meal that you really, really enjoyed. Go beyond the food—describe the plating, the ambience, the service, the conversation. If you made the meal yourself in your hotel, apartment rental, RV, or campsite, what made it memorable?
- How is the history of this place reflected in what you saw today?
- Do religion and government seem to be separate here?
- In the US, people like to think that anyone can grow up to be President. Do you think people here seem to think the same way? What evidence do you see to support this?
- How do the locals interact with nature? Is it similar to home? What might explain those differences?
- What aspects of being human are universal? What did you witness today to make you think that?
- How has this country's religion shaped the culture?
- How does the class system here compare to home? How do people with varying levels of income interact?
- What are the weather patterns like here over the course of the year? How might this affect the local plant and animal communities?
- Do you see evidence of climate change here? What was or is it?
- List some ideas to shrink your own carbon footprint.
- What did you see today that inspired you?
- Write a paragraph about any of the above ideas and then ask an AI writing assistant the same prompt. What is the same and what is different? What does this say about our future with AI?

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Artful Journal Prompts

Calling artists young and old: save these multimedia ideas and create a portfolio during your travels.

- Make a comic strip to show something funny that happened today.
- Create a drawing of the view from your hotel room or RV window.
- Collect receipts, ticket stubs, brochures, business cards, menus, and maps and tape them into your journal.
- Make a collage of pictures cut from brochures. If you've got the supplies, you could decoupage it with glitter or layered artwork.
- Draw a map of today's town, city, or park, explaining the activities you did and route you took.
- Tape together newspaper articles about current events or local culture. Add comments.
- Do a doodle inspired by today and explain why you chose it.
- Choose a small architectural detail at a famous place—for example, a gargoyle. Sketch it or describe it in detail when you visit. Take a photo if you need to remember it and finish your work later. (This is a great activity for museums and monuments.)
- Pick one tiny detail on a work of art and sketch it in your journal. (Another great museum activity. If this sort of thing really engages your child, go for a theme such as dogs, umbrellas, toys, or monsters.)
- Find a flower or new plant and sketch it (to scale, if possible). Perhaps also capture leaves, pinecones, or shells.
- Record sounds you hear on the street or in nature. Use them as inspiration to make up a song you write in your journal.
- When hiking in nature, use watercolors to capture the different shades of greens, blues, yellows and oranges you see along the trail.
- Gather the items you've collected in your journal along the way (those ticket stubs, receipts, business cards) and do an art project with them when you return home.

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Quotation Prompts

Respond to these quotations in a journal entry. You could simply read the quote then write for five minutes without stopping about what it brings up for you.

- “A nation’s culture resides in the heart and soul of its people.” – Mohandas Ghandi
- “For my part, I travel not to go anywhere but to go. I travel for travel’s sake. The great affair is to move.” – Robert Louis Stevenson
- “Traveling is almost like talking with [men] of other centuries.” – Renee Descartes
- “If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you might better stay home.” – James Michener
- “The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.” – St. Augustine
- “A journey is best measured in friends rather than miles.” - Tim Cahill
- “All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware.” – Martin Buber
- “A traveler without observation is a bird without wings.” – Moslih Eddin Saadi
- “Those who know nothing of foreign languages, know nothing about their own.” – Goethe
- “A good traveler has no fixed plans and is not intent on arriving.” – Lao Tzu
- “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.” – Marcus Garvey
- “Journal writing is a voyage to the interior.” – Christina Baldwin
- “Life can only be understood backwards but you have to live it forward.” – Charles Handy
- “There’s a part of me that thinks perhaps we can go on existing in a place even after we’ve left it.” - Colum McCann

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Prompts Particularly Suited to Younger Kids

- Collect receipts, ticket stubs, brochures, business cards, menus, and maps and tape them into your journal.
- Make a collage of pictures cut from brochures.
- Describe the funniest thing that happened today, or the worst, the most boring, the most fun, the most surprising.
- Describe one meal that you really enjoyed.
- How is breakfast different in other countries or parts of the United States? Dessert?
- If your friend was planning a trip to this place, what would you tell them to do? Would you give them any other advice?
- What would your grandmother like most and least about this place?
- Would it be fun to be here with your best friend? Why or why not?

Prompts Particularly Suited to Parents

- How is it to experience this place through your child's eyes?
- Is there anything about your children's reactions or comfort levels that surprised you today?
- Is your family dynamic changing as your travels go on? If so, how?
- Chronicle something funny, insightful, or surprising that your child said this week.
- If you are revisiting a place, how has the place changed? What is different the second time around?

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Group or Interactive Writing Ideas

- First thought/best thought: go around your group and say random words like tennis ball, croissant, river, toenail. Each person in the group responds verbally to the very first thought that comes to mind. This is a great writing warm-up to let the subconscious come out to play. Plus it is lots of fun and sure to get giggles with kids. (There is a lot of science and history behind this technique - in fact, it's what the beat poets did before starting to write.)
- Think of places you went today or this week and write each on the front of an index card. On the back, write one sentence about an impression. Then pass to the next family member for them to add an impression. And again and again. You can be broad or specific. When you're done, you can use these impressions to make a haiku or other group poem. Or, just share and ponder the different takeaways.
- Do the same as above, but ask for one word or one adjective. You could then create a word cloud about the place.
- Each person can create place-based mad libs. You might include inside jokes or funny stories. When you read them out loud, you're bound to get lots of laughs. This can be done in pairs if your kids are younger.
- Anything on these lists of journal prompts can be interactive if you share out after their creation. It's a great way for kids to get feedback and ideas for future prompt responses.

