

AAW 2025 Writing Prompt

Context:

“There will always be storms of one kind or another, but I will always be buoyed by books—hopeful, encompassing, life-saving books.”

Illustrator, author, and Caldecott medal winner Sophie Blackall reminds us of the healing balm that a book can be—for a young child, an adolescent, and an adult. The potential to heal is real whenever a reader sees some aspect of their life, however small or great, mirrored in a book that they are reading. Validation of one’s experience matters: it’s what buoys a reader and lifts them up. And feeling understood, not just seen, is such an essential part of one’s identity and shapes feelings of confidence.

Writing Directions:

Write a piece about how literature heals. Below are some ideas to get you started; however, you are free to go in a different direction.

1. Reflect on a character in a book who has felt like an ally to you. What made this character feel absolutely real and honest to you?
2. Respond to the idea that a book, or a specific character, can feel like a healing balm or ointment.

3. Representations in Texts (Bishop)

a. A mirror text is a concept or metaphor that offers a view, or mirror, of ourselves in a book. Where have you felt this validation? What healing impact did this have on you? In what way did this healing matter? For example, what did it prevent or encourage?

b. A fun-house mirror text is a concept that distorts the mirror of one’s reality. Where have you felt this betrayal of minimization from a text where hurting, rather than healing, prevented you from fully enjoying a book?

c. A blind spot text is a concept that also distorts because it magnifies, to a fault, isolated stories as collective stories. Where have you felt this kind of text? How could it be used, instead, to nurture healing about a person or group of people?

d. A curtain text is a concept that speaks to texts whose stories, private and highly sensitive, warrant a degree of protection. Where have you read a text that included images or narratives that perhaps should have been left behind a curtain? This might also speak to a particular scene or chapter in a book that hurts rather than heals. How could it have been handled differently?

e. A window text is a concept or metaphor that offers views of someone else’s world in a book. How has such a text helped you to better understand someone else’s experience? How has this text changed you?—that is, what have you done as a result of reading this text? How did it bridge, and heal, what you think you know about someone else?

f. A sliding door text is a concept that offers readers entry into a world of story: it makes you feel completely transported there. How has such a text helped you to feel empathy toward someone else? What has this text taught you about yourself? What more does this text make you want to know about yourself as well as others?

4. Research publishing trends in the last few years in the United States. Where has children's literature missed the mark in terms of authentic representation? Which stories, and voices, are going unheard? Who is suffering, the very opposite of healing, because these stories are not being shared?

Works Cited

Bishop, R. S. "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors." *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1990, pp. ix-xi.