

# 200 (or more) Words About Home

**Objective:** To write about that place that feels like home. That place of comfort where you can truly be yourself.

## Brief Explanation

Home can be anywhere or with anyone. Only you know where home is or what home feels like. Home can be a place that is visible or imaginary. Home can be a touch, a taste, a smell, an idea. Home is where you feel comfortable, where you belong, where you can breathe and be yourself and not have to worry about anyone else's judgment.

## Pre-writing

Before writing your piece about home, consider responding to these prompts:

1. Where do you most feel at home?
2. What does it feel like when you are in this place?
3. Are you alone or with others when you are home?
4. Do you have more than one place you consider home? How are these places alike? Different?

Readings before writing

Please read the three short home essays (attached) before writing your first draft.

1. "Mind, Body, Paint" by John Rodriguez
2. "The New Ghetto" by Christina Quarles
3. "The Sanctuary School" by Lynda Barry

## Writing

Write your first draft. Remember – This essay can be about a place that feels like home, but it might also contain a story with a conflict that examines how you came to realize this place you describe is truly your home.

Sample Home essays on the following pages.

Mind, Body, and Paint  
by John Rodriguez

I'm relaxing my mind, sitting on my bed, letting the music massage my ears. I'm looking out the window, watching the sun's every move, waiting for it to set. The whole time I'm in my room writing, killing time, waiting for my parents to fall asleep. I'm practicing different styles, making sure to get them stuck in my head. I peek out my bedroom door. It looks as if the coast is clear. I slide my closet door open. I slip on my black Levis, a black t-shirt, and the dirtiest black shoes I can find. I open up the top drawer of my dresser and gather my tips. I pick out the finest colors of paint. I unzip my backpack and stuff all my needs towards the bottom. Now I'm off.

I slowly open my front door. I hold my breath and take light steps. Now, I'm outside. The cold air hits my face and wakes me right up. It has me eager to get there. I walk through this mellow city, Inglewood, California. The streets are quiet. Walking down each block, I can hear my every footstep. The cans in my backpack rattle. I glance left, right. All I see are light poles and parked cars. No people. I'm near. I look around to see if there are any cops or people who might call the cops while I'm jumping in.

I'm in! My feet hit the dirt. It smells as if I landed in a nursery. The floor is covered with branches. The gigantic grey walls that surround me are covered with tagging. My heart is pounding. I look into the heavens and all I see are the blurred clouds. I make my way down the hill. The branches are constantly causing me to lose my balance. I take every step carefully. I'm at the bottom of the hill. I glance towards my right. Cars speeding at me at 70, 80 mph. I take a deep breath. I make a run for it! Across the 405 Freeway. The headlights coming my way are blinding me. My ears are crying from the cars' obnoxious honking.

Thank god, I make it across the freeway safely. I'm now near the exit on Manchester Boulevard. I can see the wall staring at me. It's the wall I've been wanting to "hit." It's beautiful. I love the way the wall is positioned so that when people are driving by, it clearly stands out. I approach the wall. I take a breather and rip my backpack open. I pull out my spray cans. My hand immediately bonds with it. I feel the coldness of its skin. I can

hear it screaming my name. I put my "New York hat" tip on the can because in my eyes it's perfect. The way the tip flares the paint out, and the thickness of the lines is just right, not too wide, not too skinny.

I'm spraying away, letting my hand guide itself, letting it go free. The paint comes out getting a tight grip on the wall, leaving a trace of fine lines. I'm rotating the can as I write, getting the perfect flare and thickness of the line. While I'm writing, my body purifies itself; relieving itself of my stress and helping me forget my worries. No more getting screamed at by my mother. No one telling me what to do. There is no other better feeling than this. I'm in another world. Nothing bothers me. It's just me, the wall, the can, doing what we do best. This is my home.

## VIEWPOINT

## The New Ghetto

By CHRISTINA QUARLES  
Special to the Palisadian-Post

Los Angeles is expensive, season-less, and crammed with ridiculous traffic. But one thing that people may not notice is that almost everyone in L.A. moves west – or at least tries to. Many areas such as Compton and Watts were once nice, predominantly white-owned neighborhoods. But what happened? Blacks and Latinos moved in, and whites moved out. However, these days white people aren't the only ones pushing west. I am an African-American who has never attended a school in the neighborhood in which I lived. When I lived in South Central, I went to school in Westchester. Now that I live in Westchester, I attend Palisades Charter High School.

My real story begins with one late night in Westchester. Westchester compared to South Central is heaven. It's a quiet, middle- to upper-middle class neighborhood. My family rents an apartment here. One night, rowdy teenagers were outside arguing. Everyone on the entire block could hear them. It went on for 20 minutes. I went upstairs to my room and tried to drown them out with music. Suddenly I heard POP! POP! POP! and the type of screams that you hear in horror movies. I knew something had gone terribly wrong and I was scared. I rushed to the window and saw two young African-American males lying on the ground. Paramedics rushed one of the boys to the hospital, while the other, who was unconscious, was having CPR performed on him. After five minutes the paramedics quit, hoisted him onto a gurney, slid him into their vehicle, and drove off. It took me a few moments to realize the boy was no longer unconscious, but dead.

I grew furious. My dad pays tons of money a month to live in this "good neighborhood" and now someone was murdered in a drive-by right outside our front door. We moved out of the ghetto so we could get away from this violence, not so it could follow us. I told my dad that we needed to move again, because this neighborhood was going to get worse, and Westchester will become the "new ghetto." He told me to stop being ridiculous. Anger welled inside me. I went upstairs and screamed into my pillow. I thought, "I'm never going to be able to escape. The only place left is the ocean, and they'll have to build an underwater city just to escape this madness, and I'll join them."

When I heard crying and wailing from outside I snapped back into reality. I suddenly realized how selfishly and heartlessly I was behaving. Someone had just lost a son, a friend; a boy had lost his life. The world was robbed of whatever potential greatness that young man carried inside him. Another young black male had fallen victim to violence, had become a statistic, and all I could think about was my Dad's rent, and a better place to live.

I can't think of a time when I had behaved like a bigger moron. I climbed down from my bed and said a prayer for the boys' families. I don't know what happened to the other young boy, but I think of them both when I walk along the sidewalk where the shootings occurred. I never knew their names, and possibly had never even seen them, but they taught me something that night. Everyone deserves to live in peace. No matter where you live, crime will always be nearby. But running doesn't solve the problem. Working for a better community, for a better world does.

Sadly, it took the death of one, maybe two teenage boys to wake me up. I need to be proud of wherever I live and to do what I can to make my community a better place, a place of peace, a place that I feel honored to call home.

*The author is a junior at Palisades High. Her essay originally ran on Dennis Danzinger's Web site, the Mad As Hell Club ([www.madashellclub.net](http://www.madashellclub.net)), an online magazine. Danzinger, an English teacher at Pali, is on leave this semester.*

## **THE SANCTUARY OF SCHOOL**

by **LYNDA BARRY**

I was 7 years-old the first time I snuck out of the house in the dark. It was winter and my parents had been fighting all night. They were short on money and long on relatives who kept "temporarily" moving in with us because they had nowhere else to go.

My brother and I were used to giving up our bedroom. We slept on the couch in the living room, something we actually liked because it put us that much closer to the light of our lives - our television.

At night when everyone was asleep, we lay on our pillows watching with the sound off. What we wanted most was to watch movies filled with gangsters shooting machine guns into crowded rooms, or watch movies about dying soldiers hurling a last grenade and movies with beautiful women crying at windows. Finally, in the middle of the night, we'd fall asleep.

The morning I snuck out, I woke up filled with a panic about needing to get to school. The sun wasn't quite up yet but my nervousness was so great, I walked quietly and let myself out the back door.

It was quiet outside. Stars were still out. Nothing moved and no one was in the street. It was as if someone had turned the sound off on the world. I walked the alley, breaking thin ice over the puddles with my shoes. I didn't know why I was walking to school in the dark. I didn't think about it. All I knew was a feeling of panic, like what a kid feels when he realizes he's lost, and I wanted to escape the panic.

That feeling eased the moment I turned the corner and saw the dark outline of my school at the top of the hill. My school was made up of about 15 ordinary-looking portable classrooms set down on a fenced concrete lot in a rundown Seattle neighborhood. However, you could see the beautiful Cascade Mountains from anywhere on the play field and you could see them from the windows of my classroom - Room #2.

I walked over to the monkey bars and hooked my arms around the cold metal. I stood for a long time just looking across the playground. The sky was beginning to whiten and I could hear a few birds.

In a perfect world my absence at home would not have gone unnoticed. I would have had two parents in a panic to locate me, instead of two parents in a panic to locate an answer to the hard question of survival during a serious financial and emotional crisis.