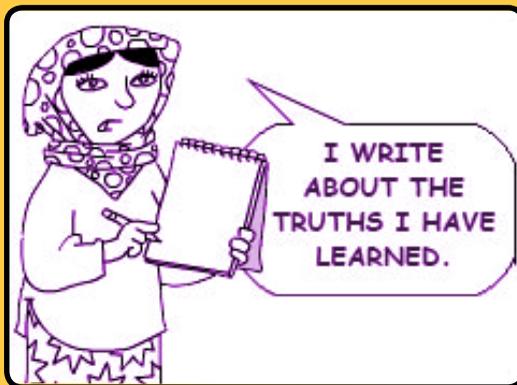
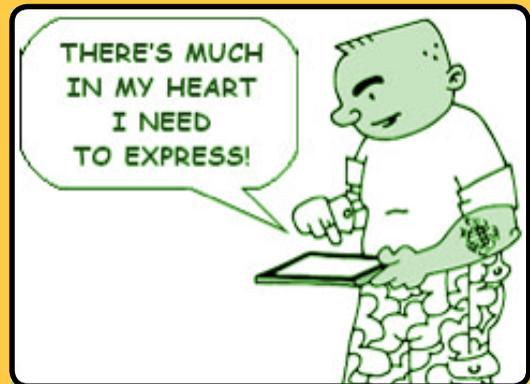
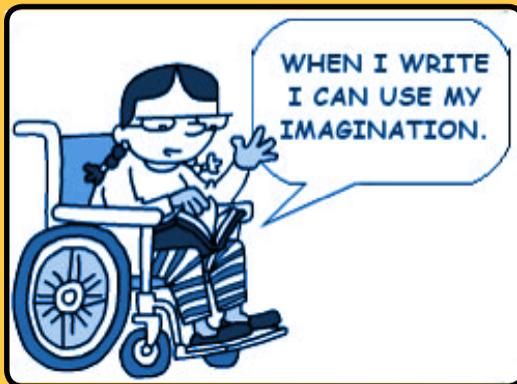


# SOMETHING TO WRITE ABOUT:

**Writing Prompts for English Language Learners  
and Literacy Students**



**by Bill Zimmerman**

Creator, [Somethingtowriteabout.com](http://Somethingtowriteabout.com)

and [MakeBeliefsComix.com](http://MakeBeliefsComix.com)

Art by Tom Bloom



**This Book Belongs To**

(TYPE YOUR NAME HERE)

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Art by Tom Bloom

**An Interactive Digital Journal  
from MakeBeliefsComix.com**

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Book design: Barbara Berasi

The author welcomes comments and suggestions about what you would like to see included in future editions.

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Thank you.

For other books by Bill Zimmerman,  
visit <http://www.billztreasurechest.com>  
or <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com>

The comic characters used throughout this book  
were drawn by Tom Bloom  
and created for MakeBeliefsComix.com.

## DEDICATION

In memory of my grandparents  
who immigrated to the United States from Europe  
and who struggled to learn the English language.

I also dedicate this book to my students  
who used many of the writing prompts in this book  
and who always wrote wonderful things  
from their hearts.



And special thanks  
for their support and encouragement  
to Donna Kelsh, Executive Director,  
and Mark Brik, Education Director,  
Institute for Immigrant Concerns, New York City,  
and to Ken English, Literacy Program Director  
at New York Public Library.  
All three people widened my world and gave me  
an opportunity to try new ideas.

—BZ

## A Word to Teachers and Students...

Write from your heart!  
It speaks your special truth.



### Dear Reader,

This book is about nothing other than things to write about... your family, your friends, your old life and your new life, feelings, dreams and goals.

I created this book of writing prompts over the years teaching English language learners and literacy students. Its intent is to help students discover their writers' voices and express the rich thoughts within them as they master the English language.

These writing prompts encourage students of all ages to write about the things in their lives that are meaningful to them—their childhood memories and family stories, the people they love and admire, their hopes for the future, their deepest beliefs. *I have always believed that everyone has a story to tell—if only someone would ask, if only someone would listen.* This book gives teachers a way to draw out students' stories and help them communicate their thoughts through writing.

Encouraging immigrant students to write is so important because it helps them better weather the enormous stress they experience as they learn their hard-won English language and adjust to life in a new land far away from their original homes. Students have told me that they often feel overwhelmed by the pressures of adjusting to a new country and hide their feelings, keeping them locked inside. Writing can change this, *writing has the power to help us find self-understanding and hope and take pride in our lives.* As someone who was very shy and verbally inarticulate as a child, as someone who had difficulty speaking up, I remember the power I felt when I began to express my ideas on paper and have those ideas read by others. Even today, I'd rather write than talk.

*Much of my work in encouraging students to write is to help them tap into the memories which feed and nurture them. By asking students to recall their past, teachers help them reveal the great richness of their lives. From the stories they write about their lives and then read in class, we learn from these writers that they are more than just struggling students who are trying to improve their English skills. We recognize them as full human beings with a history behind them and a future ahead. They are worthy of our respect and deserve to be heard.*

*In using the writing prompts in the classroom, I usually also provide some reading material that will relate to the prompt we will use that day. For example, if we are to write about a favorite relative or friend, I might provide as handouts a short essay, newspaper clipping or book excerpt in which the writer talks about such a person. Students take turns reading this aloud. Then we discuss the content. All this prepares students to think about the day's subject. (A rich resource for such handouts is the excellent annual Literacy Review of immigrants' writings published by New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study—<http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/undergraduate/writing/literacyproject.html>.)*



*As my students write, I play a CD with some quiet, meditative music to help them relax and get in touch with their memories and thoughts. The music helps transform the classroom into a sacred writing space where the most wonderful writing is done.*

*When the students complete their pieces, they are encouraged to read aloud what they have written. Doing so helps validate the importance of the thoughts they have expressed in their written words and broadens the thinking of the other students. *We quickly learn that each of us has something valuable to impart to others.* Students also are welcome to first experiment with their essay ideas by creating a comic strip at [MakeBeliefsComix.com](http://MakeBeliefsComix.com), another useful resource for the classroom.*

I hope that this book of writing prompts will spark your imagination as you develop your own writing ideas. I hope, too, that by using these prompts you will discover many special things about your students' lives. They want someone to read and listen to their special stories. This book pays honor to them.

Sincerely,

*Bill Zimmerman*

Bill Zimmerman

Creator, [Somethingtowriteabout.com](http://Somethingtowriteabout.com) and [MakeBeliefsComix.com](http://MakeBeliefsComix.com)

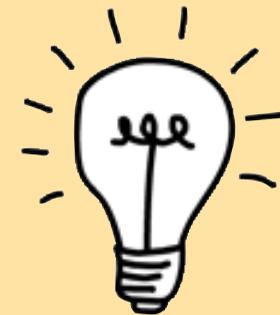
P.S. This book is formatted as an interactive digital journal. When downloaded, it will allow your students to type directly on their computer screens into the areas with lines on the blank pages that face the writing prompts. When a student is done typing, simply save the document until the next time she or he is inspired to make new entries. Students also can print out any pages that they want.

You can find additional writing ideas in the other MakeBeliefsComix e-books:

- [Hummingbird Joy](#): A Book of All the Things That Make You Happy
- [Laptop Letters](#): Sending Wise & Loving Messages to Young People in Your Life
- [Make Beliefs to Spark Your Writing](#): Words I Wish Someone Had Told Me As a Kid
- [MakeBeliefsComix FILL-ins](#)

And please try out the many writing ideas at my writing blog, [Somethingtowriteabout.com](http://Somethingtowriteabout.com).

## Writing Prompts to Spark Your Imagination...























## Write A Letter To A Friend Whom You Haven't Seen For A Long Time

Sit in a quiet place and think of an old friend or relative whom you have not seen in a long time. Share your life with your friend by writing a letter to this person.

Tell him or her about some of the important things that have happened to you in your life since you last met. Before you write your letter, make some notes about two or three of the most important changes in your life. Perhaps one of the changes is your moving to a new country. Perhaps another change is your adjusting to a new life which is different from the life that you knew in your former homeland—what is different now?

Perhaps you have returned to school or have a new love or even a child who has been born to you. Perhaps you are working in a new job. Or, perhaps you have changed a lot from the person you once were. Maybe you have lost a family member. There are happy and sad things you want to tell that person. Have you had some funny or strange experiences that you wish to share? What are the important things you want to tell your friend?

In writing your letter, imagine that your friend is in the room with you and that you are having a conversation together. Perhaps you have a photograph of your friend that you can look at while you are writing your letter to him or her. What would you say to that friend or relative?

TYPE/ WRITE HERE

A large rectangular area with rounded corners, containing horizontal lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the writing area.









## Tell The Story Of An Immigrant

Imagine that you know this immigrant (perhaps it is you). Write the story of this person's life.

- Why did he or she come to the United States?
- Where did they come from?
- What are their hopes and dreams in coming to this new country?
- Did they leave their families behind in their former country?
- Are they happy, or afraid, or hopeful, or worried?

- What do they think about?
- What do they hope to accomplish in life?
- Will they have a hard or easy life in this country?
- What will be their future?
- What kind of work will they do? Will they get married and have a family?

Try to tell the story of this immigrant. You can start your essay in the first person with these words:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ . I come from \_\_\_\_\_ .

TYPE/ WRITE HERE

A large rectangular area with horizontal lines for writing, intended for the student to type or write their story.































































































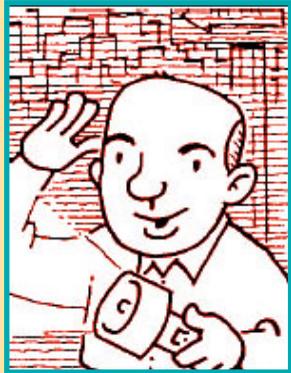








## About the Author



In his more than 20 books and work as a newspaper editor, **Bill Zimmerman** has pioneered innovative writing techniques to help people express all the important things within them. His books and web sites are used in literacy and English Language Learning

programs around the world and to encourage creative thinking.

His web sites are: <http://www.billztreasurechest.com>, which features excerpts from all his books, <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com>, which enables visitors to create their own online comic strips, and <http://www.somethingtowriteabout.com>, his writing prompts blog for students. Please visit them.

### Among his popular books are:

- *Pocket Doodles for Kids*
- *Make Beliefs: A Gift for Your Imagination*
- *Lunch Box Letters: Writing Notes of Love and Encouragement to Your Children*
- *How to Tape Instant Oral Biographies*

## About the Illustrator



**Tom Bloom** is an artist who has brought joy to the world with his cartoons and illustrations which have appeared in many publications, such as The New York Times, The New Yorker, Fortune and Barron's. He has collaborated with Bill on many other books.

### Share With Us

We would wholeheartedly welcome your feedback on using *Something to Write About: Writing Prompts for English Language Learners and Literacy Students*. Please send us your thoughts or suggestions on how we can improve this book, along with your permission to use your ideas. We also would welcome your ideas for new writing prompts. **For every idea used, a free copy of one of Bill Zimmerman's books will be sent to you.** What was your experience like in using this book? Please share with us.



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## Another Free Interactive Digital Journal



### **Something to Write About: Writing Prompts for English Language Learners and Literacy Students**

is part of a series of free interactive digital journals published by [MakeBeliefsComix.com](http://MakeBeliefsComix.com). They are part of our mission to help people of all ages discover their writers' voices and express their deepest thoughts through writing.

### **The other e-books are:**

- [Laptop Letters](#): *Sending Wise & Encouraging Messages to Young People in Your Life*
- [Hummingbird Joy](#): *A Book of All the Things That Make You Happy*
- [Make Beliefs](#) to Spark Your Imagination
- [Words I Wish](#) Someone Had Said to Me As A Kid
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If you find our work useful, please consider making a small financial contribution to us at PayPal.com at:

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And please share our work with your friends, family members and colleagues. Thank you.