

*From the desk of Kevin Wright, NCTE rep*

For a first-time attendee, the NCTE annual convention can be an overwhelming experience. There were over 7,000 people registered for the 2006 convention in Nashville Tennessee in November.

For one thing, the programme document was the size of a small-town phonebook, and it listed twenty to thirty concurrent workshops every hour or so. How was one to choose a workshop to attend and leave the other extremely appealing ones aside? All the choices looked so good.

The organizers realized the extent of the dilemma and set up a breakfast meeting during which they gave advice about how to survive the long days and the long distances between the venues: wear comfortable shoes, and take time to eat. This was all the more important since the Gaylord Convention Centre covers five acres, under glass.

What follows is the first in a series of reports on ideas and techniques demonstrated by presenters at the convention.

**Christopher P. Condon**, of the Great Valley Writing Project showed how questioning can deepen and develop the writing of students at almost any grade level.

Begin by asking the students to draw the floor plan of the house in which they presently live or one in which they have lived. Then they must label the rooms and include the layout of some of the furniture.

The students will look at the floor plan and try to bring back memories associated with the house and its rooms. They will write each memory on the floor plan in the exact location if they are able to recall it. Each memory must include at least one other important person besides themselves

Have them close their eyes and think of details about the area inside and outside the house where the memories occurred This can be any sensory experience, including smells and / or sounds.

Ask the students now to open their eyes and, around the edges of a blank piece of paper, write five details about the area inside the house.

Ask them to find a partner and take turns asking each other questions about each detail Add the specific details next to the original detail.

Next, ask them to imagine a picture of the other person from their memory in the middle of the page

Have them find a partner and take turns asking each other questions about each detail to make it more specific. Add more specific details next to the original detail.

Next have them imagine a picture of the other person from their memory in the middle of the page. Brainstorm all the things they can remember about that one memory with that person in it.

Have them list the details around the middle section of the page, but leave the very centre open. They can draw a picture of the person if it helps them with remembering.

Instruct the students to write a snapshot of that one moment. Be sure that it is a fairly short segment of time they are writing about. Tell them to create a picture with words. Instead of "My brother and I roasted marshmallows," they should have something like, "Yellow-red flames lit our faces and warmed our hands."

When they have finished, have them read over what was written and ask themselves at least two questions that will lead to more detail. Go back and add those details to their snapshot.

The drawing of the floor plan is not an end in itself, but a springboard to get the students think and writing.

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