

Creative Writing Activity for “Camper Girl” by Glenn Erick Miller

(Grades 7-12)

*In “Camper Girl,” Shannon Burke describes going on a journey in an old camper van that she inherits from her estranged aunt. With a series of maps and letters to guide her, Shannon travels through the Adirondack wilderness in northern New York State in early autumn while most of her peers are experiencing their first year of college. Her purpose is to solve the mystery behind these clues. Though she solves the mystery, the truth is shocking and forces Shannon to learn that a person’s path through life is never clearly marked.*

1. Students brainstorm and create index cards with specific examples for the following four categories: *vehicles, places, times, purposes* (similar to the underlined items in the synopsis above). The examples can be real or imaginary. After 5-10 minutes, students turn their cards in to the teacher who places them in four piles.

(Vehicle examples: Spaceship, a Tesla, bicycle, garbage truck, horse, skateboard, time machine, submarine, etc.)

(Place examples: Antarctica, Egypt, gymnasium, cave, Mt. Everest, Walmart, Mars, escalator, etc.)

(Time examples: Christmas Eve, midnight, sunrise, 1776, ten minutes in the future, one minute before a big exam, rush hour, etc.)

(Purpose examples: To try out a new video game, to take a nap, to experience zero gravity, to learn piano, to celebrate a birthday, to water ski, etc.)

2. While the teacher thoroughly mixes up the four piles, students brainstorm a list of possible characters for their story (Examples: A grandfather, LeBron James, a painter, Elmo, etc.)
3. Each student is then randomly given one card from each pile (for a total of four cards) and uses them to create a short scene in which one of their characters takes a journey, incorporating the details listed on the four cards in front of them (vehicle, place, time, purpose). However, instruct students to stop short of finishing their story.
4. After writing for 10-15 minutes, students are asked, “Now, does your story’s main character get what they want?”
5. On a separate piece of paper, students make two columns with the headings “Yes, but…” and “No, and…”
6. Beneath each heading, imagine two different endings for the scene. (For example: *Does LeBron James get to take a nap? Yes, but he oversleeps and misses the big game. Or, no, and he is so tired that he loses the big game.*) Which ending do you prefer and why?
7. Students are then asked to develop their favorite ending and finish their story. After another 5-10 minutes, students can share their stories with classmates.