The Story *Bank*

A home for ideas before you choose an essay

Collect scenes, curiosities, questions, contradictions, and memories. You are building a supply of possible material for college, boarding-school, or summer-program essays. There is no need to choose a topic today.

Six doors into a story

Try each one. An ordinary moment can be more revealing than an impressive accomplishment.

01 A tiny scene

Something you still see clearly, even if nobody else remembers it.

02 A question that stays

A question you keep asking or a mystery you investigated.

03 A change of mind

Something you used to believe differently.

04 A peculiar interest

A collection, rabbit hole, routine, or unexpected enthusiasm.

05 A choice or hesitation

When you acted, held back, tried again, or changed direction.

06 A place or object

A room, route, desk, tool, recipe, or object with a story behind it.

Give six possibilities working names

Use shorthand. Record what came to mind, even if it seems unfinished or too strange.

01

02

03

04

05

06

Get closer to the scene

"I enjoy science" is an interest. The experiment you ruined, the note you kept, or the argument over a result might be a story. Stay with what actually happened.

Three moments worth opening up

Pick three entries from page 1. For each, capture one concrete detail and one question you could follow.

01 **Working name or memory** _____

One detail I could actually see or hear

Something I wonder about this moment

02 **Working name or memory** _____

One detail I could actually see or hear

Something I wonder about this moment

03 **Working name or memory** _____

One detail I could actually see or hear

Something I wonder about this moment

Try an unexpected doorway

Write down one moment from an ordinary day: waiting, arriving, making something, sharing a meal, getting lost, or explaining an idea to another person.

Make some connections

Two experiences can illuminate each other, even years apart. Look for recurring questions, habits, people, places, and ways you respond to the world.

Put two ideas side by side

IDEA A

A memory, interest, or question from your growing bank.

IDEA B

Something that appears unrelated at first.

What might connect them?

Test a few possibilities

Complete any of the sentences below. If one leads nowhere, move to another.

A question I keep coming back to...

What problems, people, ideas, or mysteries recur?

A role I often find myself taking...

The observer, organizer, skeptic, maker, listener, mediator...

Something I do differently now...

Where can you see a shift across time?

Leave room for the odd one out

A story that breaks your pattern may be just as interesting. Keep it.

Keep the bank growing

You have material now. Save it so you can return to it when you encounter a particular essay question or remember something new.

Your working inventory

Choose up to four seeds to carry forward. This is an inventory, not a ranking.

Working name	Detail I want to keep	Question to return to

What belongs in the folder?

- ☐ This worksheet and any extra memories you jotted down
- ☐ Interesting details, quotes, images, objects, and questions
- ☐ New possibilities that appear during classes, interviews, or conversations

What to do next

Keep adding to your Story Bank. When one idea makes you curious enough to explore it further, try The Practice Draft guided exercise. You can return to this bank whenever a new prompt arrives.

Find the next exercise: admissionscontrol.com/resources/practice-draft/

Your experiences are yours to share or keep private. You do not owe an application a painful disclosure. A quiet, funny, or specific moment can say plenty.