

Timelines Writing Assignment

We read and discuss Liz Ahl's poem: "[Defining Moment](#)"

How do shared national experiences shape our individual lives?

How does the historical context of our lives constrain or enable certain meanings more than others?

Divide a paper lengthwise into fourths to create three timelines:

Begin with the year of your birth and end with the present. You can also do more focused timelines that cover only a small period of your life.

On the first line, plot events in your personal life. You can start with the major ones, like high school graduation, but try to include lesser events as well.

On the second line, plot historical events such as September 11th, or the Obama inauguration.

The third line is for popular culture, such as the introduction of the Star wars movies. Choose items that might have had personal relevance for you, rather than ones you were not aware of.

The idea of the assignment is to juxtapose historical and cultural events with your personal history. So your narrative should revolve around a personal experience, but include references to social and political issues. You can try drawing vertical lines on your timeline to see how these events line up. Even events which may not seem to have a direct relationship to your life can be used to provide a context for your life events.

Your narrative may make the event part of the plot of your story, or it may play a more minor role.