

Writing Prompts for the 2023 Mary Helen Straker Award in Writing

This year's competition is open to Muskingum County students in their sophomore or junior year of high school. The submission period extends from January 3, 2023, through February 23, 2023, at 11:59 p.m.

A second prompt for students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 has been added this year. Interview transcripts will be submitted through the portal. Visual responses must be delivered to the J.W. & M.H. Straker Foundation by February 23, 2023.

All written submissions will be accepted through the entry portal at www.strakerfoundation.org.

Princess Sarah's story is all about home—about her finding homes and making homes throughout her life.

Sarah was just over a year old when her mother made the difficult decision to allow her child to be adopted. Sarah found a home with Jim and Judy Culberson, her adoptive parents, and their daughters became her sisters.

Sarah created new homes in her undergraduate days and when she traveled to the West Coast for graduate school.

When she found her birth father, Sarah also discovered a new culture. As she got to know her biological family, she was exploring another place to call home.

Thinking About Home (Students in Tier 1)

Please pick one of the following prompts and respond by writing an essay of 750 to 1500 words. Your essay should both demonstrate that you have read Princess Sarah's book and showcase your unique and thoughtful reactions.

1. Describe what growing up in the Culberson household was like for Sarah. Then write about what her childhood would have been like if she'd grown up in her father's home in Sierra Leone. What important things would have been different? What important things would have been the same?
2. In the 'San Francisco' chapters, Sara describes being on her own and creating her first adult home. What were three of her biggest challenges? Imagine yourself at Sarah's age (24), establishing your own home. What will be your most important considerations, and why? In what way(s) can Sarah's experience give you insight?

Please check with your teacher to ensure you are using your school's preferred method of citing sources; include page numbers for specific references to Sarah's book, and please feel free to use quotes (properly attributed, of course) from *A Princess Found*.

Entries should be double-spaced and in Times New Roman font.

Making a Home—Prompt #2 (Tier 2 and Tier 3 students only)

Like Sarah, you may be called upon to find and create new homes. There are two ways of responding to Sarah's story below. Please choose **one** of them to create your entry.

1. Thinking about what home means to you, create five to seven questions centered on the idea of creating a home.

Examples of a question might be these:

- What will be your favorite room in your home-to-be, and why?
- What is one thing you must live close enough to walk to? Explain why this is so important.

When you have created your questions, work with your teacher to set up an interview. At the interview, YOU will answer the questions you wrote. The interview will be taped.

Work with your teacher or technical support to create a transcript of the interview. The transcript will be submitted through the contest portal.

2. Working with your teacher, respond to the prompt visually. You could draw or paint an image of home; you could create a collage. You could build a small model of a home. What other media could you use to illustrate your idea of home?

Your illustration should be accompanied by a short, written explanation of what your artwork tells us about your vision of home.

Things to consider include...

- WHERE your home will be
- The PEOPLE you want to share your home with
- What KIND of home (apartment, house, condo, etc.) you'd prefer
- What kind of ENVIRONMENT you'd like (countryside, neighborhood, bustling city...sleek and modern, cozy and country, eclectic...)
- What WORK you'll be doing
- HOW you'd like to use your home (will it be a quiet haven, a busy place where friends and family often drop in, an active space with gym equipment and maybe a heated pool...)
- What RESOURCES are important? Do you need to be near a theater, a school, a library? Will you have a car, or will you need a supermarket and pharmacy that you can walk to? Do you want to be close to sporting events or beautiful parks?