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# Tell Your Story

*A Self-Expression  
Workbook for Teens*

By  
The Digging Deep Project

With  
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Disclaimer: This workbook is not a substitute for professional  
mental health treatment or medical care.



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# About This Workbook

This workbook is a space for courage, creativity, and healing.

It's here to help you explore a story from your life — a real moment, memory, or experience — and to do it at your own pace, using writing, drawing, movement, imagination, and reflection.

You don't need to know your whole story right now.

You don't need to know how it ends.

You don't even need to know which story you want to tell.

You only need to begin.

Every page is an invitation, not a requirement.

Skip around. Try what feels helpful. Leave the rest.

There's no "right way" to do this — only your way.

If anything feels too heavy, you can pause and return when you're ready. These pages are here to support your courage and imagination, not to rush you.

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# Before the Story Begins

*Creating safety, clarity,  
and courage for the  
journey ahead*

Before you step into your story, this section helps you settle in, check in with yourself, and gather what you need to move at your own pace. These pages are designed to ground you, strengthen you, and remind you that you're in control of how you explore your memories and experiences. You'll get to know your emotions, your strengths, and what helps you feel safe.

There's no rush. No pressure. Just space to begin.

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*Part 1*

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# How Are You Feeling Right Now?

Notice your mood, your body, and anything that's coming up right now — even if it feels small or confusing. You might write things like, "This is stupid and makes me want to eat too much ice cream," or "I just remembered that time my cat ate chewing gum." Or you might doodle a ninja dog fighting squirrels. This is just a snapshot of today, nothing more. Use this space to write or draw what you're feeling or anything your body or imagination shows you right now.



## SIDE QUEST

Write down one creative mode don't use very often, like movement, collage, doodling, poetry, music, dance, etc. Circle it if you might try it later in the workbook.

# The Warm Fuzzies

Fill this page with words or drawings of anything that helps you feel steady — people, places, actions, reminders, or objects that calm your body or mind. These do NOT have to be deep, profound, serious, or “therapy-sounding.” They just need to be things that actually help you in real life, no matter how small or ordinary.

“Warm socks” counts.

“Scrolling cat memes for a few minutes” counts.

“Holding my water bottle” counts.

## SIDE QUEST

When I feel overwhelmed, one small thing that helps me come back to myself is:

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# 4 Creative Doorways

## Doorway 1: Words

If words feel like your path today: Write one sentence that captures the feeling of the story you might explore.

It doesn't need details – just mood. Examples:

- “It felt like everything was too loud.” “I didn’t know what to say.” “I felt small but strong at the same time.”

## Doorway 2: Images

If drawing feels like your path today: Draw one symbol that shows how your story feels right now.

It can be a shape, a color, a tiny sketch, a pattern, anything. Examples:

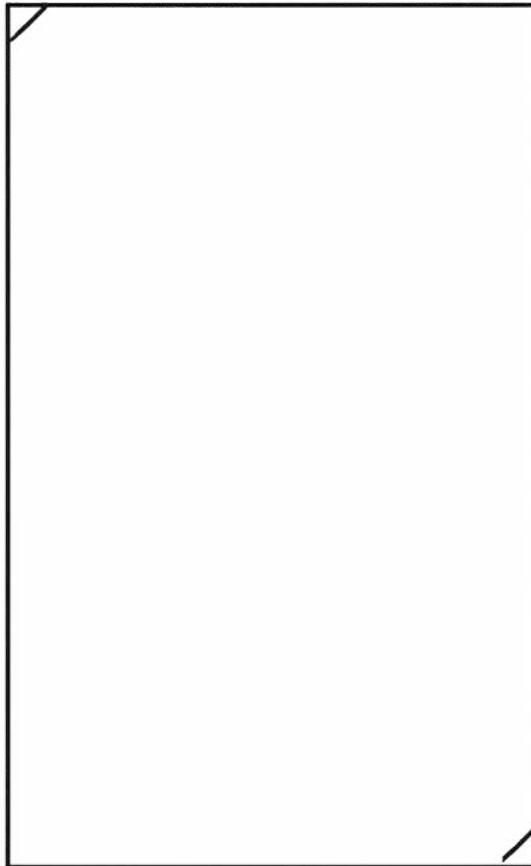
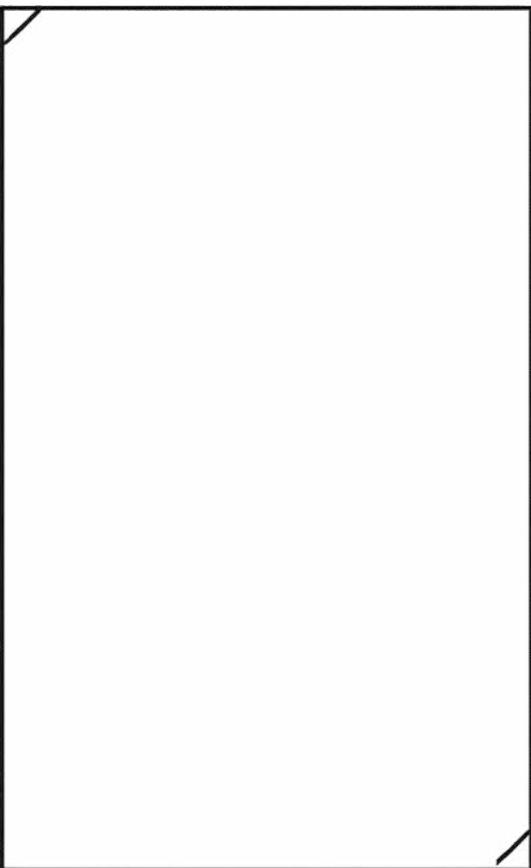
- A wave, a crack in the ground, a rising sun, a tangled circle, a star

# 4 Creative Doorways (continued)

## Doorway 3: Movement

If movement feels like your path today: Choose a pose that matches how your story feels. Hold it for 3 deep breaths.

Then draw a tiny stick figure or write two words describing the pose here:



## Doorway 4: Imagination

If imagination feels like your path today: Imagine your story as something else – a storm, a maze, a locked box, a garden, a room with a closed door, etc. Use this space to draw or write your metaphor.

# Strength Mirror

Strengths don't always feel loud. Sometimes they show up quietly, in small choices or moments you barely notice. Look at the list below and circle any words that feel even a tiny bit true for you today (or add your own!). Now choose ONE of these strengths. Write it here in big letters and decorate it:

Kind	Curious
Observant	Honest
Caring	Determined
Funny	Patient
Thoughtful	Persistent
Caring	Resilient
Hopeful	Adventurous
Hardworking	Gentle
Empathetic	Empathetic
Determined	Open-Minded
Strong-Willed	Flexible

## SIDE QUEST

Think of a moment – even a small one – when this strength showed up in your life. Complete the sentence: This strength showed up when I \_\_\_\_\_

# Feelings Vocabulary Map

Imagine your feelings today as a landscape – a place with hills, valleys, rivers, islands, storms, sunshine, or quiet spaces. This page is where you map it out. In the big open space on this page, turn your feelings into places.

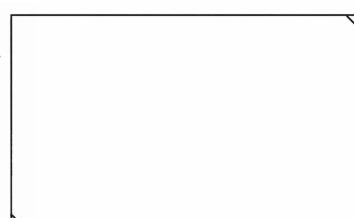
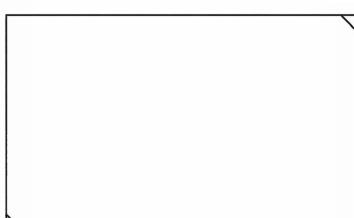
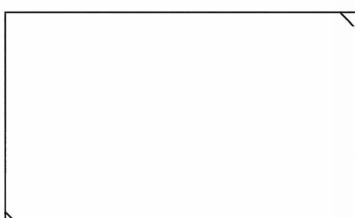
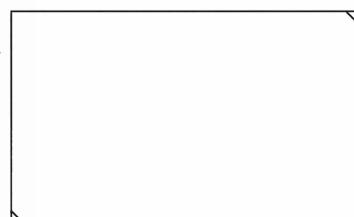
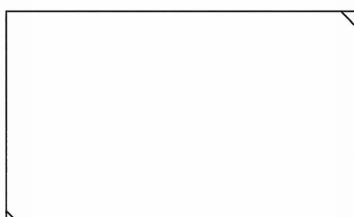
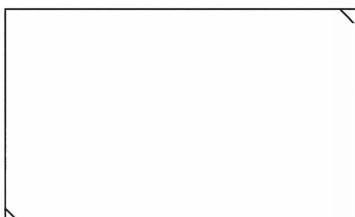
Some ideas:  
Sadness → a rain cloud  
Hope → a sunrise hill  
Anger → a volcano  
Calm → a still lake  
Anxiety → a winding path  
Confusion → a maze  
Pride → a summit or lighthouse

## SIDE QUEST

Choose two or three parts of your map and give them a name. Examples: Mount What-If, The Valley of Not-Enough, River of Hope, Overthinking Swamp, Cove of Please Just be Quiet

# Tiny Memories

Sometimes it helps to start small. Think of tiny memories – simple or random things, not your main story! – and play with them. Use this space to draw or write about as many memories as you like. These memories might make you laugh or smile or cringe or cry. This gentle warm-up helps loosen your creative muscles before exploring deeper stories.



## SIDE QUEST

Draw a tiny symbol (star, dot, leaf, etc.) next to the memory that feels the lightest or most comforting.

Draw another symbol next to the memory that is heaviest.

# Postcard To My Past Self

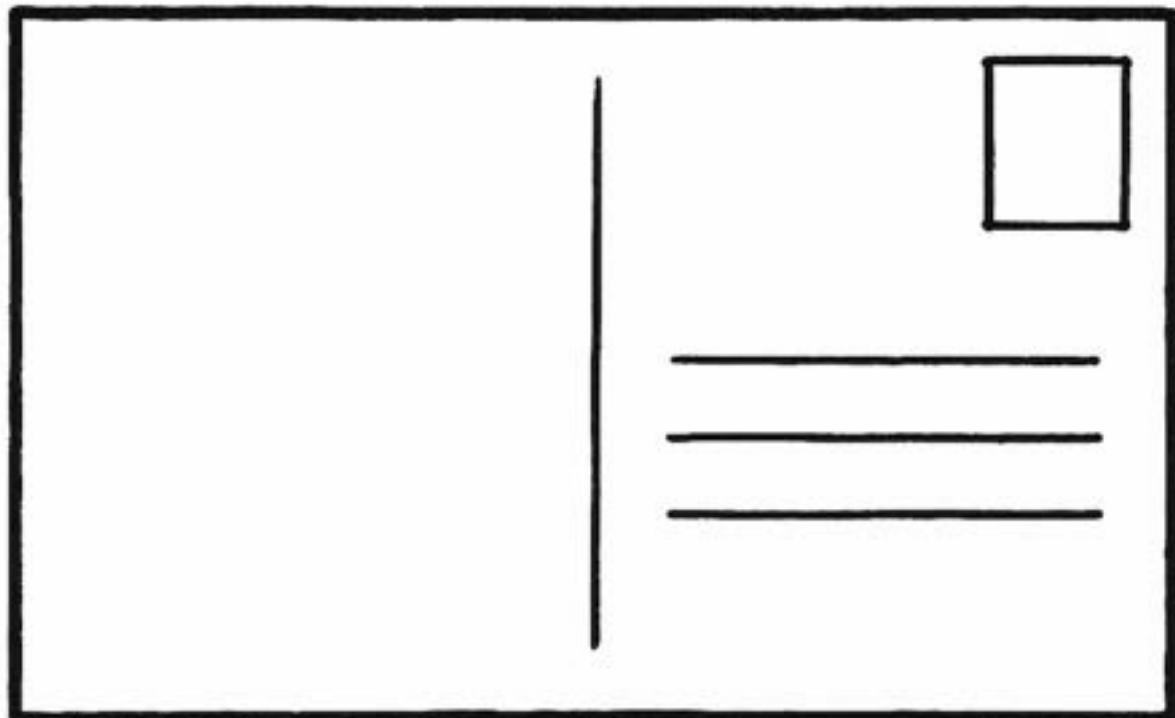
Sometimes we look back on our younger selves and realize they were carrying things they didn't know how to handle yet.

*Maybe they didn't have the words.*

*Maybe they didn't have support.*

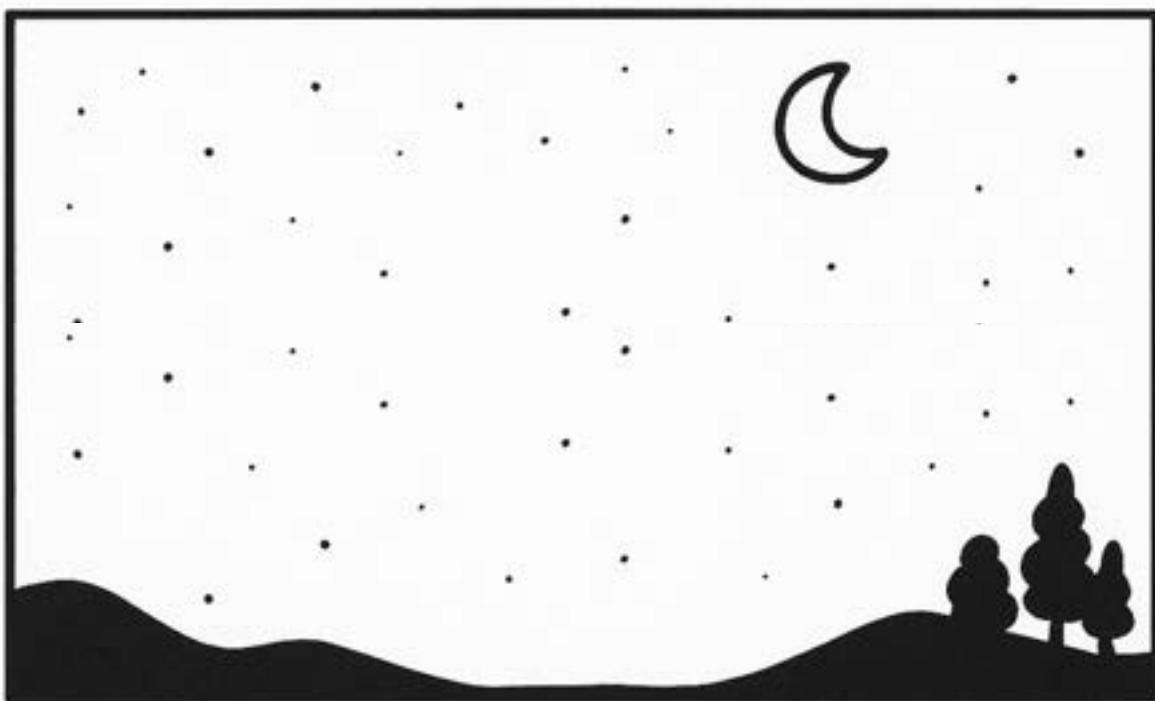
*Maybe they were doing the best they could with what they knew.*

Imagine sending a message through time to a younger version of yourself. What would you want them to know, understand, or feel comforted by? Write freely, like you're whispering encouragement to yourself across years.



# Support Constellation

Imagine your sources of support as stars. Some are bright, some are faint, some appear only at certain times. Fill the sky with people, places, activities, or memories that help you feel safe or grounded. Your constellation might surprise you.



## SIDE QUEST

Circle the “brightest” star —  
the one that helps you most right now.

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# Exploring Your Experience

*Finding your voice through  
memories, meaning, and  
imagination*

Here is where your story begins to take shape. You'll work with memories, feelings, metaphors, and creative exercises to share your experience in ways that feel manageable and meaningful.

Every mark you make—whether a word, color, doodle, or symbol—is part of the story you carry and the strength you’re uncovering.

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*Part 2*

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# Okay Already, It's Finally Time To Pick A Story To Tell

**Every story starts small – sometimes as a whisper, a feeling, or a moment you're not sure how to name yet. Now it's time choose a story that feels safe enough to explore today.**

Here are different kinds of “story seeds.”

Put a  next to any that feel familiar or interesting:

A moment I keep remembering  
A feeling that keeps returning  
A decision or turning point  
A time I felt proud  
A time I felt misunderstood  
A moment when something changed  
A conversation that stuck with me  
A challenge I got through  
A moment I wish had gone differently  
A small memory  
Something I'm ready to understand  
Something I'm curious about  
Something I've avoided

**Choose ONE seed you want to start with or write your own.**

**Write it here in a simple phrase (no details needed):**

**My story seed today is:**

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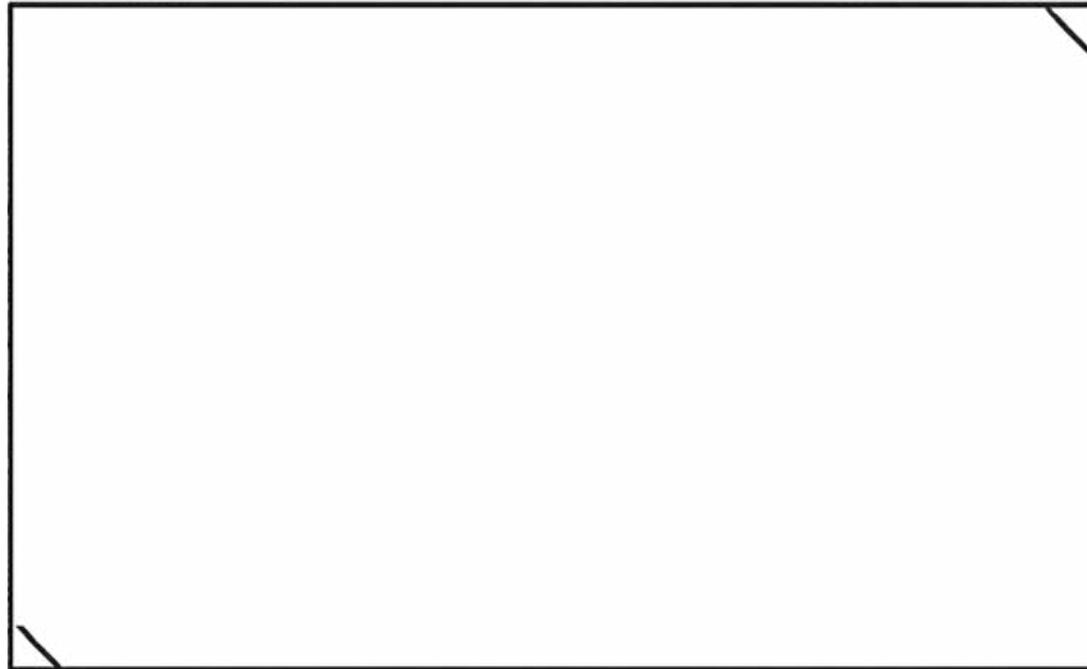
# Grow Your Story Seed

If you feel comfortable, describe your story seed in just a few words. Then use the rest of the space to draw a very basic outline.

Examples:

- “A school moment”
- “A friendship thing”
- “A fear I had”
- “A time I learned something”
- “A confusing moment”
- “A happy memory”

**Story Seed**



# Metaphor Menu

Look at this menu of metaphors. Circle any that match the energy of your story — not the details, just the feeling. If you want, make up your own metaphor.

## Nature Metaphors

- A storm
- A seed growing in the dark
- A cracked rock
- A tangled forest
- A mountain pass
- A frozen lake
- A thundercloud
- A sunrise
- A wildfire that cleared space

## Object Metaphors

- A locked box
- A broken pencil
- A heavy backpack
- A puzzle with missing pieces
- A dim lantern
- A stretched rubber band
- A knotted rope

## Journey Metaphors

- A maze
- A long hallway
- A bridge
- A road with detours
- A doorway
- A crossroads
- A narrow path

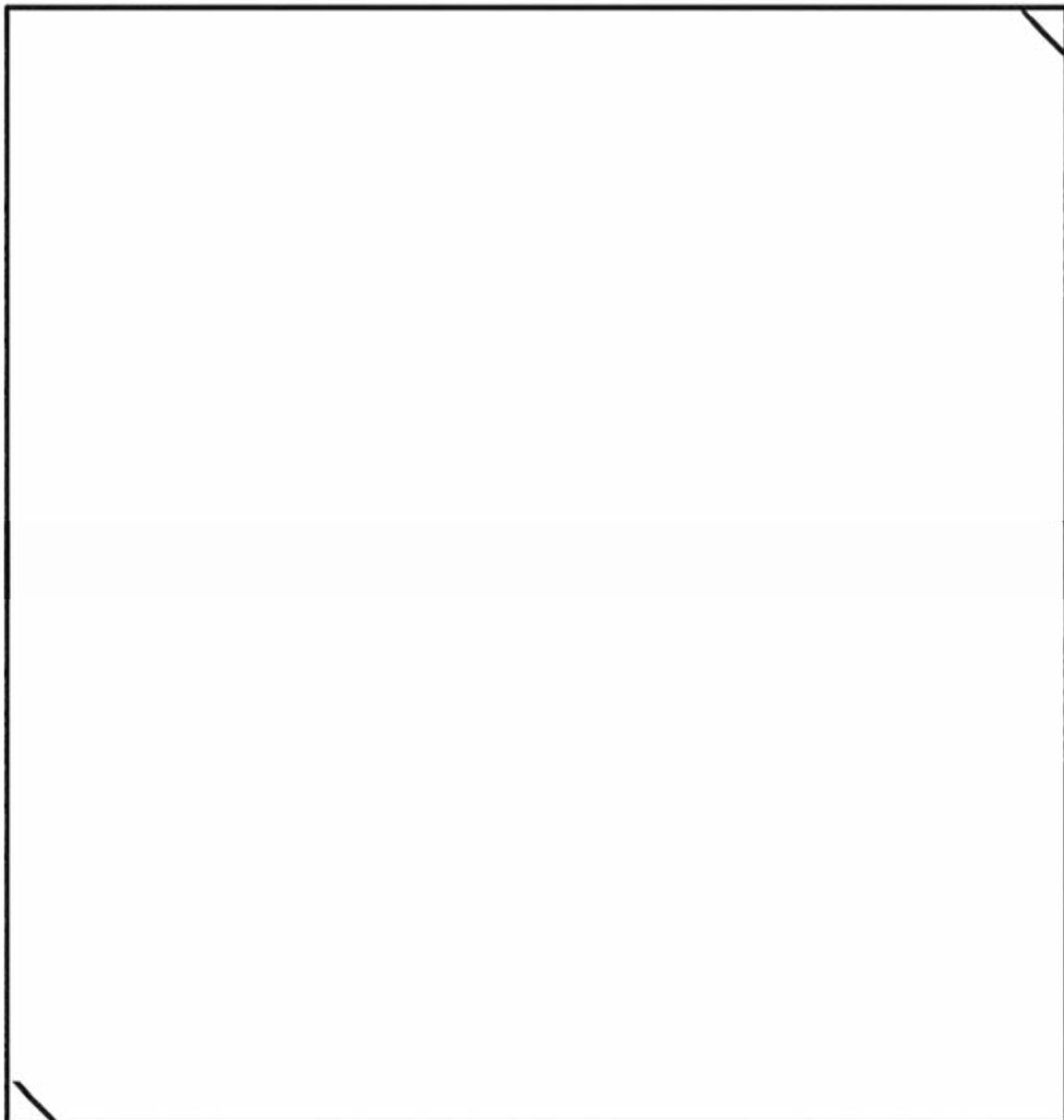
## Feeling-Shape Metaphors

- A swirl
- A jagged shape
- A foggy window
- A tight circle
- A spiral
- A floating balloon
- A cracked shell

Why did you choose this metaphor?

# Draw Your Metaphor World

Now you'll turn the metaphor you chose on the last page into a whole world. Draw shapes, shadows, textures, or simple lines. Your drawing doesn't need to explain anything – it only needs to express something true.



# The Question

Sometimes a story isn't just an event — it's a question we keep carrying with us. Questions can feel heavy, confusing, hopeful, or all three at once. This page helps you name a question without needing to answer it.

Look at the list below. Circle any questions that feel familiar or close to your heart today.

**Questions about myself:**

- Why did I react that way?
- What does this moment say about who I am?
- What do I need now?
- Am I changing?
- What do I really want?

**Questions about the past:**

- Why did that moment matter so much?
- What was I trying to protect myself from?
- What do I wish I could have said?

**Questions about others:**

- Why didn't they understand?
- What were they feeling?
- Do they remember it the same way I do?

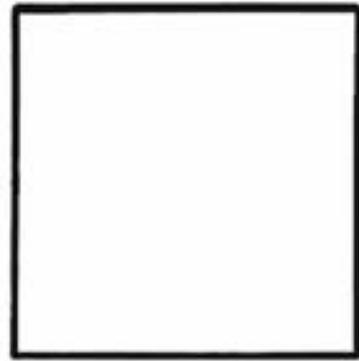
**Questions about the future:**

- What happens next?
- Will things get better?
- Who am I becoming?

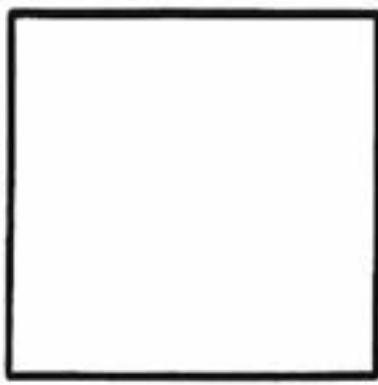
**Or write your own:**

# Freeze Frame

Stories don't have to be told all at once. Try capturing your experience in just three small images or moments. Think of them like photographs: one from the hardest part, one from a turning point, and one from where you stand now.



Hardest Part



Turning Point



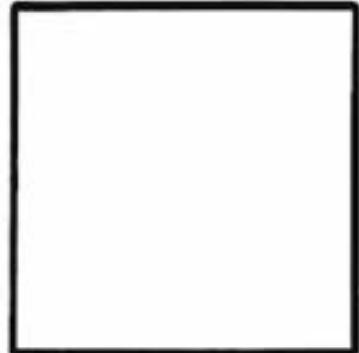
Where I Am Now

## SIDE QUEST

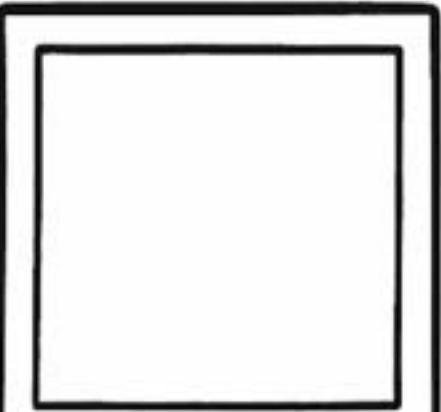
If each snapshot had a soundtrack, what song or sound would play behind each one? Label each snapshot with its song.

# My Story In Six Words

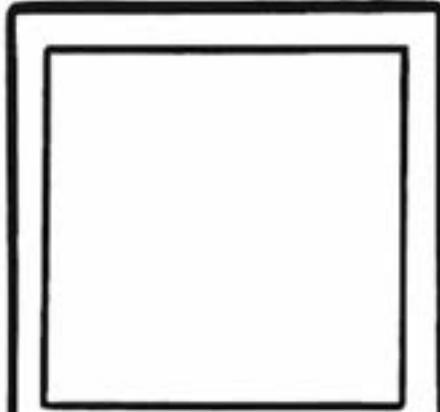
Let's go a deeper. Think about the photographs you wrote/drew on the previous page. Now write 5-10 words about each one – one for the hard moment, one for a turning point, and one for where you are now. Let the words be simple or poetic – anything true.



Hardest Part



Turning Point



Where I Am Now

## SIDE QUEST

Write one six-word version using only verbs:

\_\_\_\_\_

## So, I Have a Friend Who...

Sometimes it's easier to tell your story as if it's not your own. Tell the story as if it happened to a character, not you.

There was a person who...

They felt...

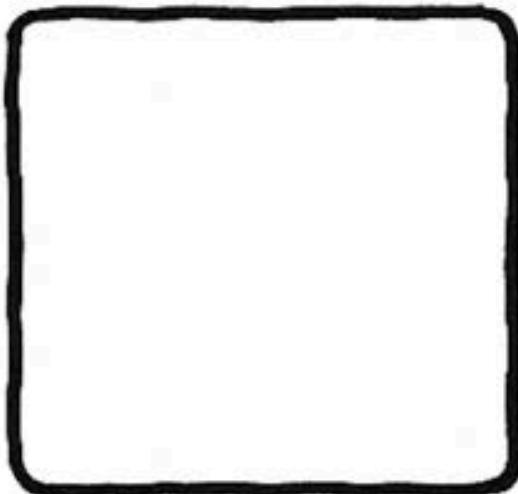
They made it through by...



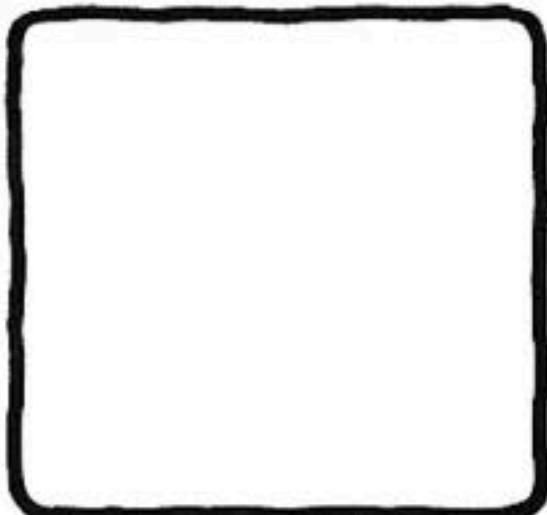
# Before, During, After Map

Stories have chapters. Try gently mapping what came before your moment, what the moment felt like, and what shifted afterward. You don't have to share every detail — just sketch or describe the outline, like drawing or writing about the shape of a mountain without describing every rock.

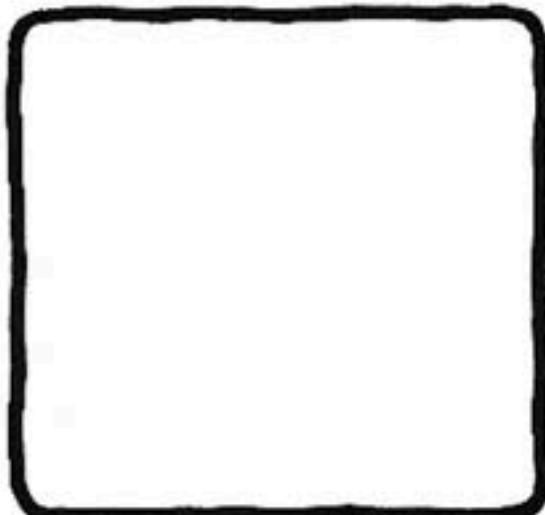
**BEFORE**



**DURING**

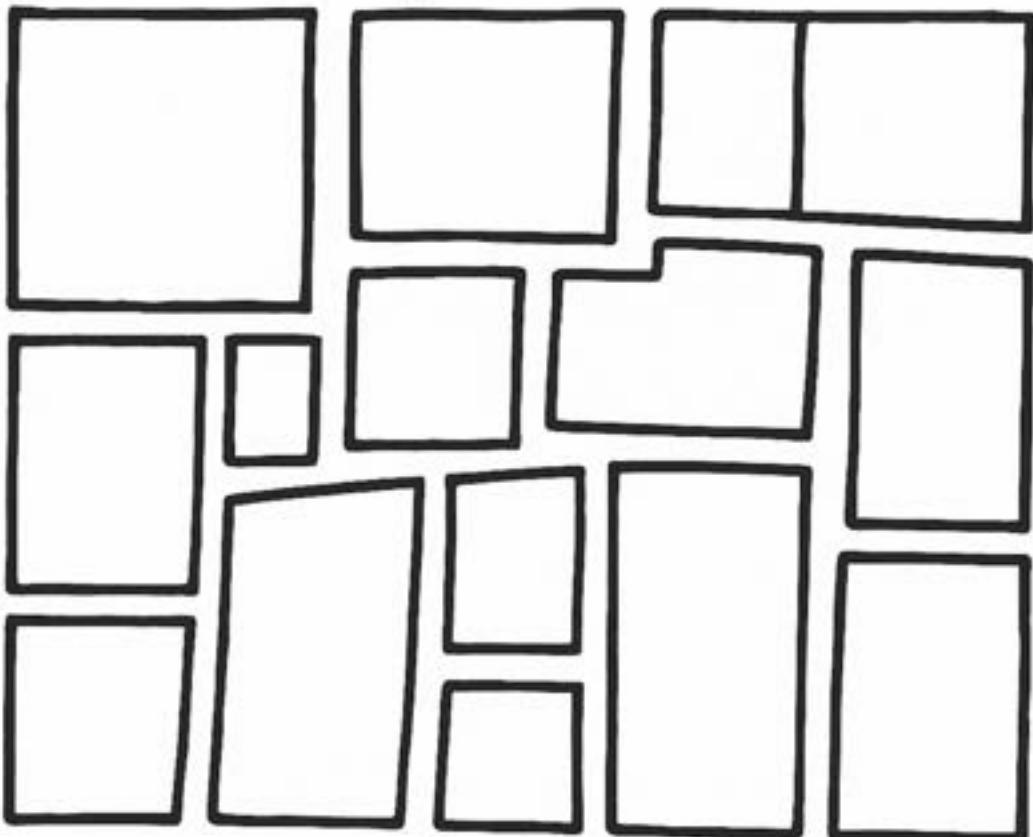


**AFTER**



# Comic Strip

Turn your moment into a small comic strip. Stick figures are perfect. Draw scenes that represent what happened — or what it felt like inside. Comics let your story speak in pictures instead of heavy words.



## SIDE QUEST

Label each panel with one word for the emotion in that frame.

# Power Poses

Imagine your body is telling part of the story. Draw a pose that shows how you felt – curled, frozen, tense, or anything else. Then draw how you wish you could have felt – grounded, brave, steady. Noticing the difference can show you what your body might need more of.

**HOW I FELT**

**HOW I WISH  
I FELT**

# You Time

**These are the last pages in this section. Use this page and the next one to write or draw as much or as little as you want about your story. Or you could cut/paste picture from a magazine, write poetry, song lyrics, or just write a word cloud. If you need more space, you can use your own paper and shove the pages into this workbook. Use this space to express yourself.**

# You Time (continued)

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# Understanding & Growing

*Using what you've learned  
to imagine the road ahead*

This section helps you turn your reflections into direction. You'll identify what you've learned from your experience, what you want to keep, and what you're ready to set down. You'll imagine future versions of yourself and the pathways that might lead there.

This section isn't about big leaps—it's about finding the next right step.

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*Part 3*

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# Beyond The Hard Stuff

**Hard moments are part of your story, but they are not the whole story. Before you dive back into your experience, take a second to notice the parts of yourself that continue to shine, grow, or quietly exist even during tough times.**

**Part 1:** Think about things that make you feel alive, calm, curious, or simply you. List or draw any three – big or small:

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**Part 2:** Everyone is good at something – listening, noticing details, being patient, making people laugh, solving problems, climbing, creating, surviving.

Write or draw one thing you're good at:

--

**Part 3:** In the box below, draw or write a snapshot of you that has nothing to do with your struggle. It could be:

- You doing something you love
- A place where you feel like yourself
- A symbol of your personality
- A color or pattern that represents your energy
- A moment you felt proud, silly, peaceful, or curious

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# The Big List Of Learning

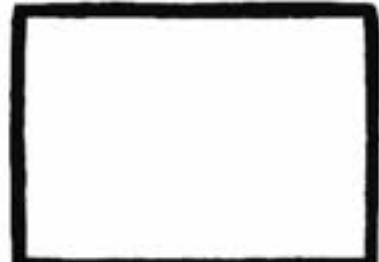
Experiences — even hard or confusing ones — can shape how we see ourselves, others, and the world. The next two pages are about noticing what you've learned, what surprised you, or what you've become aware of. Fill each box in a way that feels right today.

## WHAT THIS EXPERIENCE TAUGHT ME ABOUT MYSELF

- A trait I discovered: \_\_\_\_\_
- A reaction I didn't expect: \_\_\_\_\_
- A strength that surprised me: \_\_\_\_\_
- A struggle I want to understand better: \_\_\_\_\_
- Or draw a symbol that represents something you learned about yourself.

## WHAT THIS EXPERIENCE TAUGHT ME ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE

- "Some people can support me."
- "Some people can't understand everything."
- I can ask for help.
- I learned who listens.
- People can be complicated. Write or draw your own



# The Big List Of Learning (continued)

On the previous page, you explored what you've learned about yourself and about other people. On this page, write or draw what you've learned about safety, strength and what you want now.

## WHAT THIS EXPERIENCE TAUGHT ME ABOUT SAFETY

Safety can mean physical safety, emotional safety, or a sense of belonging.

Complete one or more:

- I feel safest when \_\_\_\_\_
- I did/didn't feel safe because \_\_\_\_\_
- Now I know that safety for me looks like \_\_\_\_\_

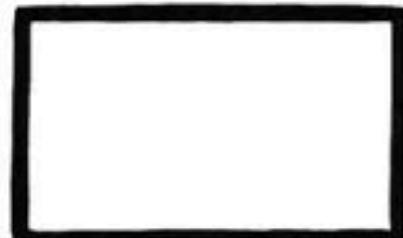
Or draw a symbol of safety – a shelter, nest, lock, anchor, beam of light, etc.

## WHAT THIS EXPERIENCE TAUGHT ME ABOUT STRENGTH

“Strength looked like...

“I used strength when I...

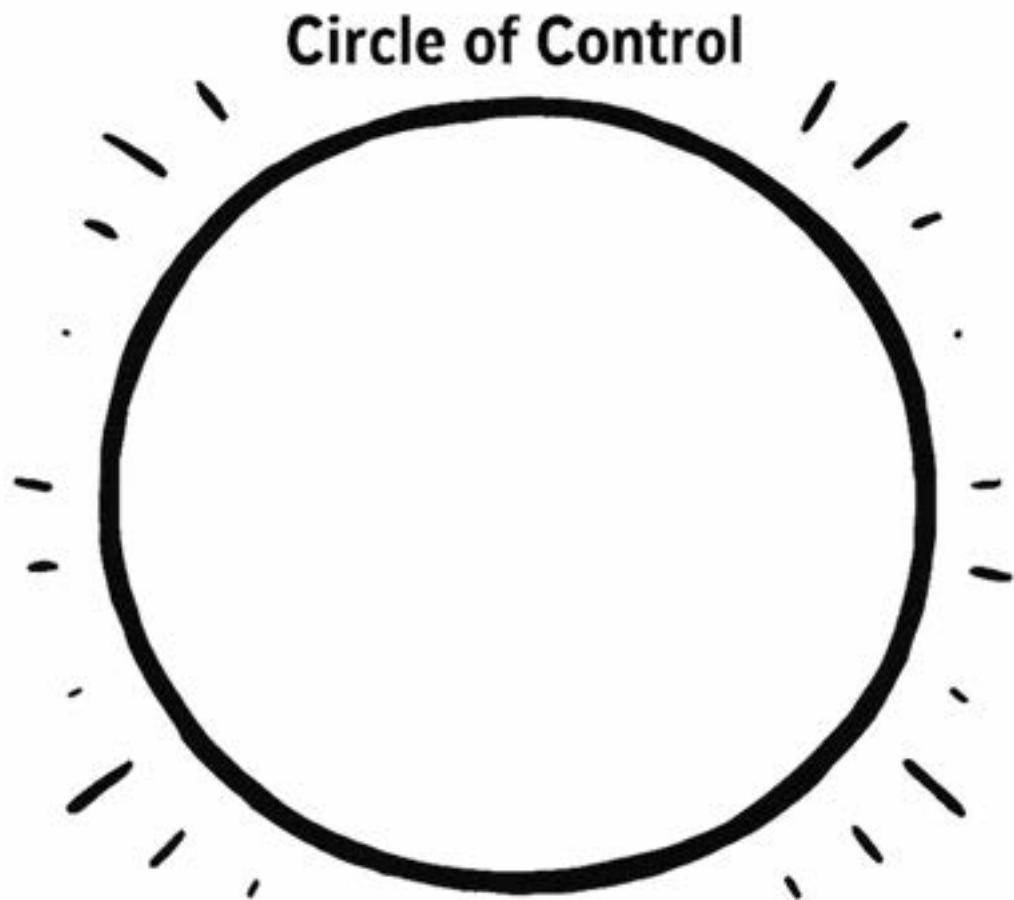
“I didn't realize I had strength until...



Or draw a symbol: a mountain, flame, sprouting seed, rope, shield, hand, etc..

# Circle of Control

Some things are in your hands; many things aren't. That's part of being human. Draw or write what belongs inside your circle of control – and what belongs outside. These can be things directly related to your story or things that you notice about your life today.

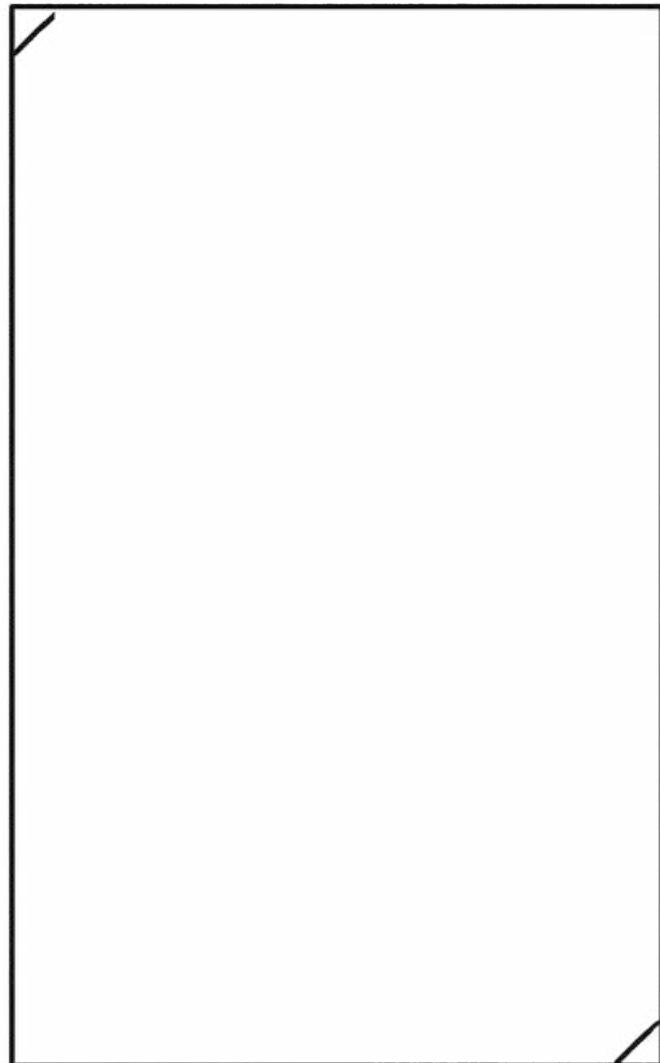


# Take It Or Leave It

**Every experience leaves us holding things — emotions, beliefs, habits, questions, strengths. Some things help us grow. Some things weigh us down. Some things were never ours to carry in the first place. This page and the next will help you sort through what you're holding so you can choose what belongs in your future.**

**Start by thinking about your experience and list anything that comes to mind. List as many things as you can! These could be:**

- **feelings**
- **beliefs**
- **strengths**
- **fears**
- **habits**
- **questions**
- **memories**
- **lessons**
- **hopes**



# Take It Or Leave It (continued)

Look at what you wrote on the previous page. Now add symbols:

- Arrow: Something you want to carry forward
- Pebble: Something that feels heavy, draining, or tiring
- ★ Star: Something you carry that you didn't choose – it was placed on you
- ∞ Spiral (optional): Something you're still figuring out

Look at the “carry forward” items with arrows →

Choose the two or three that matter most to you and write/draw more about them here:

--	--	--

Now look at the items with pebbles ●  
What is one thing that feels especially heavy?



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I MIGHT WANT TO PUT  
THIS DOWN SOMEDAY

---

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I'M TIRED OF CARRYING  
THIS BECAUSE

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# My Experience, Wrapped

Music can hold memories, emotions, and hopes. Create a playlist for your journey — songs that matched then, songs that match now, and songs that help you grow. Designing an album cover lets you express the mood of your resilience.

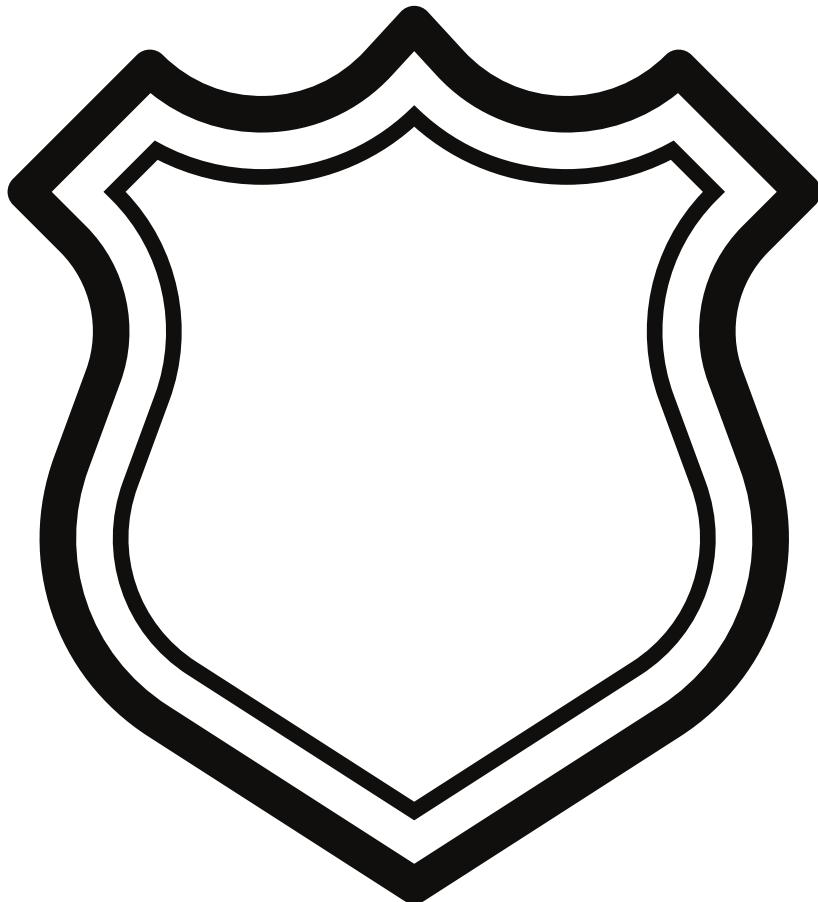


## SIDE QUEST

Write a lyric from any song that feels like it “gets” you right now:

# Badge of Honor

Create a badge that represents your strength, courage, or growth. It can be symbolic, funny, serious, or abstract. Let it be something you'd wear proudly in your inner world. Include as many symbols as you like that have meaning to you.

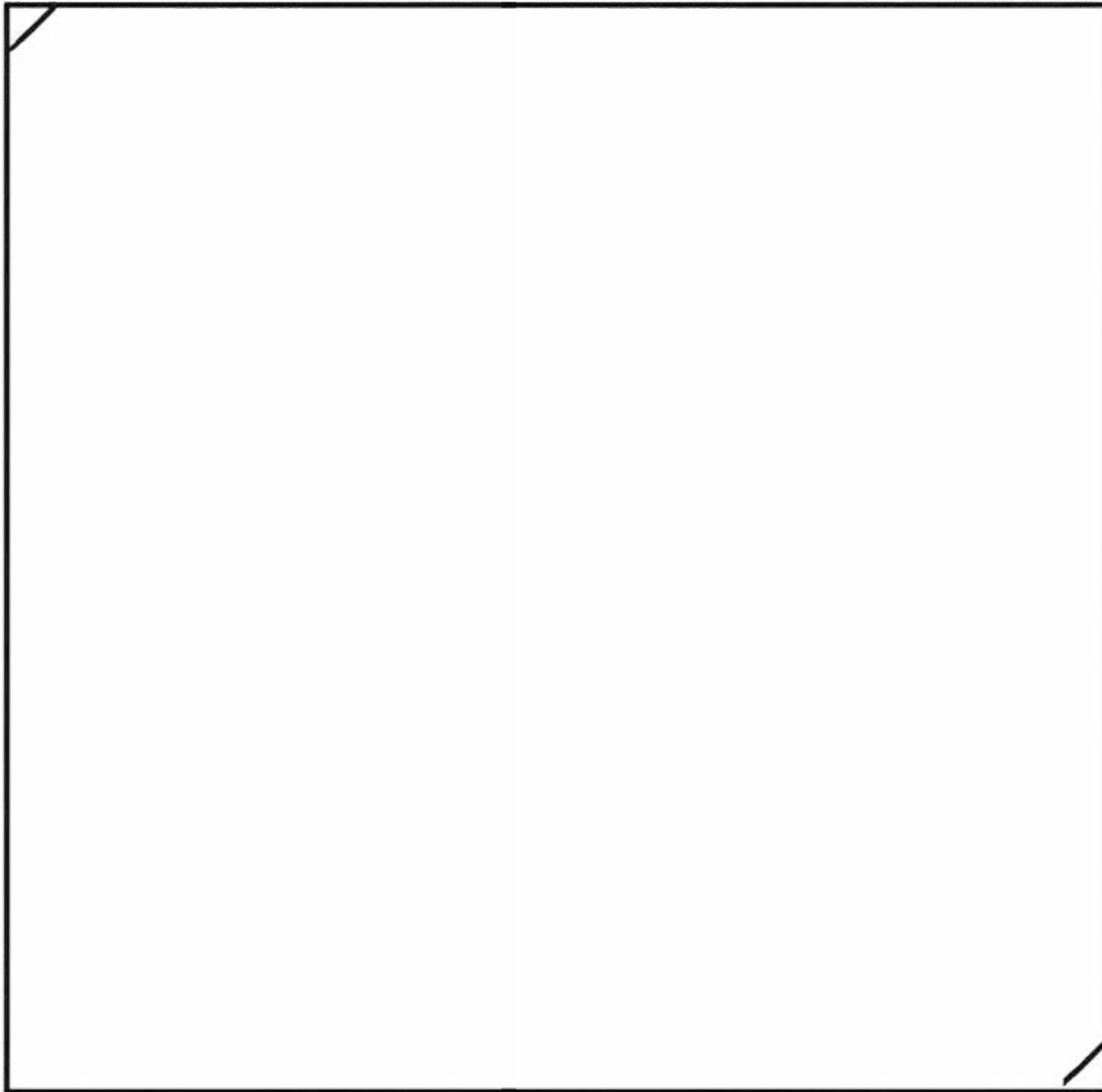


## SIDE QUEST

Add a motto to your badge (3–5 words) that represents your own personal power.

# Final Reflection

**Look back at the journey you took through these pages. What did you discover about yourself? What surprised you? What do you want to keep practicing? Celebrate anything you feel proud of – even the small things count.**



# Doodle Page

**This workbook is meant to be revisited. As you think of new things about your story, either add them to one of the pages in this book or use this page whenever you want to explore a new layer of your story. Choose your creative mode – writing, drawing, movement – and let the page become whatever you need today.**

# About The Authors

## About the Digging Deep Project

The Digging Deep Project was founded by philanthropist Sheri Sobrato as a way to provide emotional support for young people going through tough times. She was inspired to create this project because she discovered so much about her emotions and herself during her own personal challenge with cancer as a young adult.

The Project began its journey with the journaling book *Digging Deep: A Journal for Young People Facing Health Challenges* by Rose Offner, MFA and Sheri Sobrato, MA (Resonance House, 2014), followed by the mobile self-help app, *Shadow's Edge*, and now continues with this workbook. Parents, teachers and caregivers can find resources at [www.diggingdeep.org](http://www.diggingdeep.org) or join our community at [Facebook.com/DiggingDeepProject](https://Facebook.com/DiggingDeepProject).

## About Kristi Pikiewicz, PhD

Dr. Pikiewicz earned her PhD in Clinical Psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute in Carpinteria, CA. She completed pre-doctoral training at the Nan Tolbert Nurturing Center in Ojai, CA, and her post-doctoral internship at the Boulder Institute for Psychotherapy and Research. She currently provides remote and in-person educational assessment and counseling through Clover Learning Center ([cloverlearningcenter.com](http://cloverlearningcenter.com)). Previously, Kristi designed and delivered a social-emotional learning curriculum for a K-8 school in Boulder, CO with a mission for gifted education, and spent eight years as a middle school language arts and social studies teacher. In addition to her mental health training, Kristi holds a B.S. in environmental science from Allegheny College and a teaching credential from Western Washington University.