

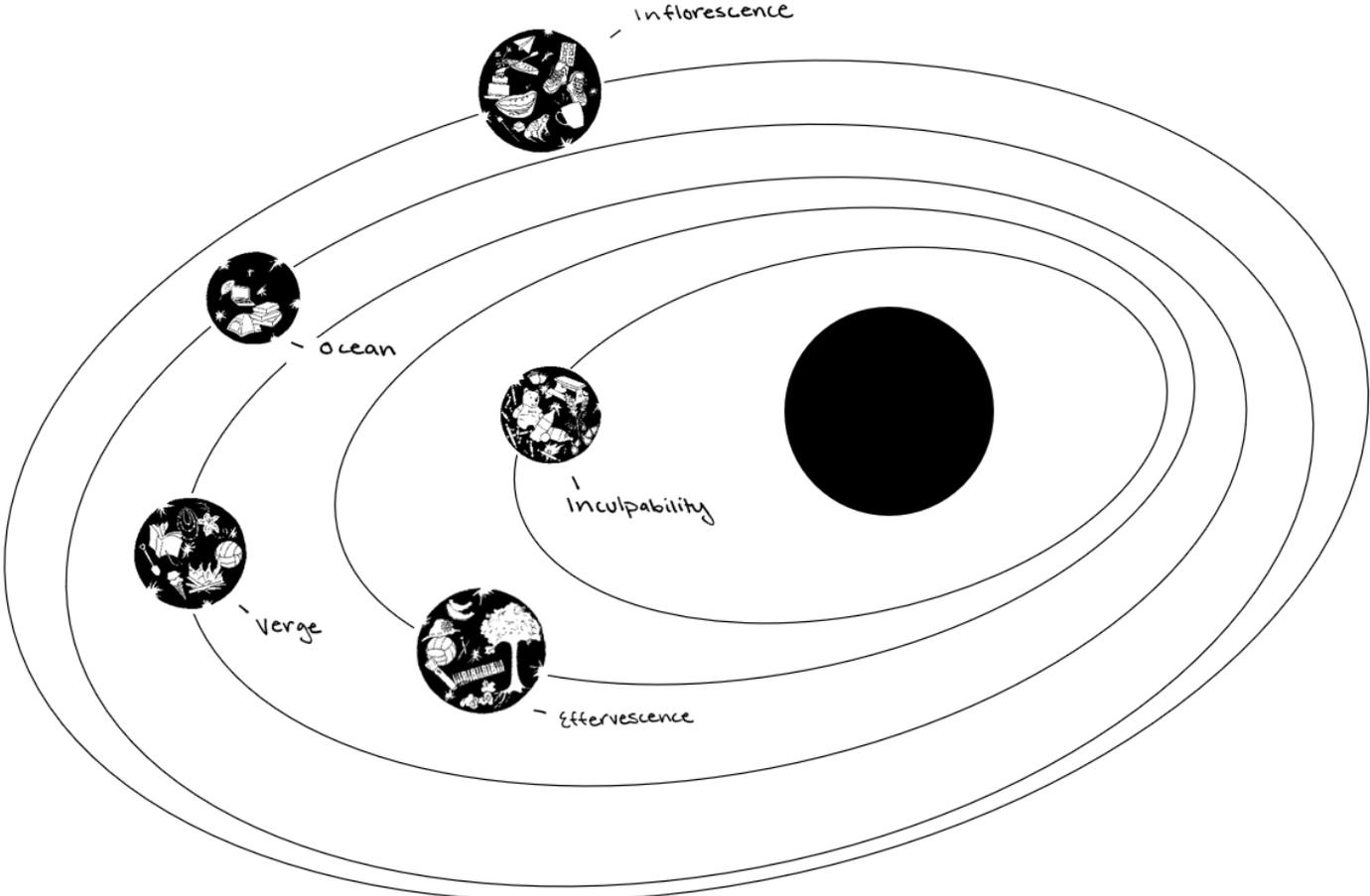
Orbit

I have always had a terrible memory. Even as a kid, I would constantly lose things around the house. Inevitably, I would run down the stairs, asking my family, “Do you know where my _____ is?!?!?” and we would proceed to spend the next hour looking for a pair of sunglasses, a toy, a missing shirt, or an umbrella and end up finding it somewhere obscure and unlikely after some hunting around. Unfortunately, this forgetfulness has persisted into adulthood, earning me many eye rolls and sighs from my mom who has, by now, just learned to accept that I forget stuff about one second after she tells me something. There have been many “take those clothes up the stairs” “take the garbage bins out” and “put those papers away” followed five minutes later by “did you do _____?” and of course, my answer, “no sorry, I forgot!”

I don't know why I have been plagued with this certain type of forgetfulness. Maybe the memory gene skipped me and landed on my sister who seems to have gotten some magic memory potion—she can remember that I was wearing a blue shirt while petting the neighbor's dog on June 10, 2014. Anyway, I have found myself thinking a lot about memory lately, what it is and what its patterns of gain and loss are. While this short-term memory plague, for me at least, is merely an annoyance, having trouble accessing or even losing long term memories, difficult memories, and memories that I cherish is much more troubling and difficult.

Lately it seems, memory has a way of eluding me, sweeping in like chiffon fabric on polished floor tiles and then sweeping right back out on the wind, leaving me only the chance to brush my fingertips across the fabric. This dance happens again and again, memories filing into and out of conscious thought, orbiting some central mass inside my brain. That's why, when it comes to memory, I think of it less of a filing cabinet full of images and words and more of a solar system with floating clusters of memories like planets; snippets of images; flashes of light amidst the dark caverns of my brain. These clusters, these planets, each containing memories from a nebulous period of time in my life.

Like the solar system that we live in, the solar system that is memory contains many planets that orbit a central body. The central body is like the sun, the first breath of birth, a first consciousness — beautiful, but inaccessible. The planets closest to this central body represent the furthest points back in time, the earliest cluster of memories and each successive planet expands the timeline outward. Each planet, like the ones in our solar system today, has its own hue and composition, formed from an explosion of energy and life and the coming together of millions of different fragments into a single entity. These planets are surrounded by rings, like arms wrapped around bodies, each ring a specific memory that solidified itself as part of that planet. Together, these planets are a spinning mass, a space to be explored, a place to be awestruck, a wonderland of the past, a solar storm minefield, a crashing, crumbling, island of loss and beauty.



Inflorescence

Ocean

Inculpability

Effervescence

Verge

Planet: Inculpability (1998-2005)



The eagle

as it swoops down for its
prey running in the sand.

The scenery flashes by backwards. When I get on the Metro, I always like to sit facing the back of the train, my little mind bending as I watch trees and buildings fall away into the distance. It's summer. Vacation in Maryland. I am ___ years old. Backpack in front of me, I press my head to the plastic window, feeling the tug of the Metro car as it rounds the corner. Excitement. Anticipation. Family waiting. We get off the train, leave the rough checkered seats behind. Aunt Tracy arrives, we get in the car. _____. Ask where my purse is. Dread. Realize I must have left it on the Metro. Barbie purse, pink plastic keys, ____, fake flip phone, _____. Tears. Treasured items. Torn away.

Planet: Effervescence (2006-2010)

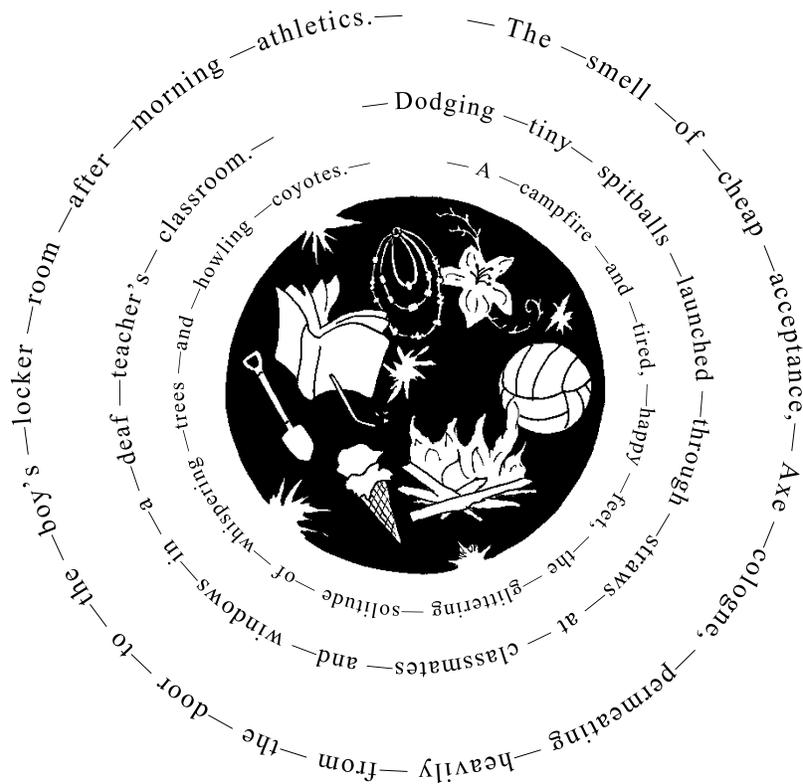


Whitewater

over rock that
bends the edges round.

___ AM. Our white van in front of the school. Me inside. I am scared of ___ and refuse to get out. I delay and delay like thick morning fog that refuses to rise. Around me, kids stream out of cars, backpacks slung low like turtle shells. The sound of slamming doors and car engines. It's been minutes and I still haven't left. ___ minutes until the school bell. Mom threatens Halloween privileges. Tears. Paralysis. Threatens to call the principal. Calls the principal. High heeled shoes approaching the sliding van door. Tears. Hiding under the backseat. Dragging myself up and exiting the van. Wipe my face. _____. The next day Mom sends me to school with a picture of our family taped to my planner.

Planet: Verge (2011-2013)

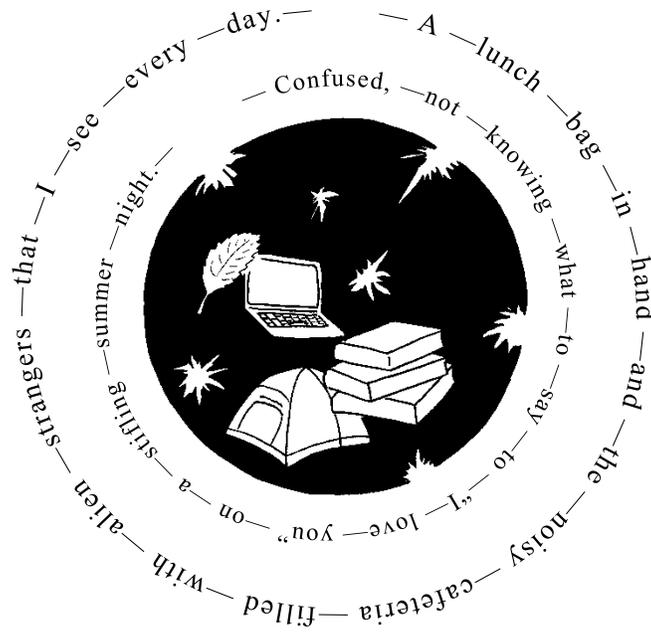


Nails

that dig into arms,
leaving crescents on skin.

Through the doorway and the quiet settles in. A line of pianos, their keys upturned like bright white smiles. Benches that squish out air when you sit, making a purring sound. _____ always sits on the bench next to me. Headphones on. Piano book opens. Class starts. Getting lost in the notes from my piano for long stretches of time. Playing songs over and over. Pressing the pedal down to hold onto notes like one holds onto spring flowers and sunsets. Rich notes like thick chocolate cake. Notes that stretch like the sunrise. Notes that tickle my eardrums. Notes that sound like cavernous reverberations. Notes that build a pocket of space, a pocket of time. For the ___ minutes of class, I fly away into the blue.

Planet: Ocean (2014-2017)

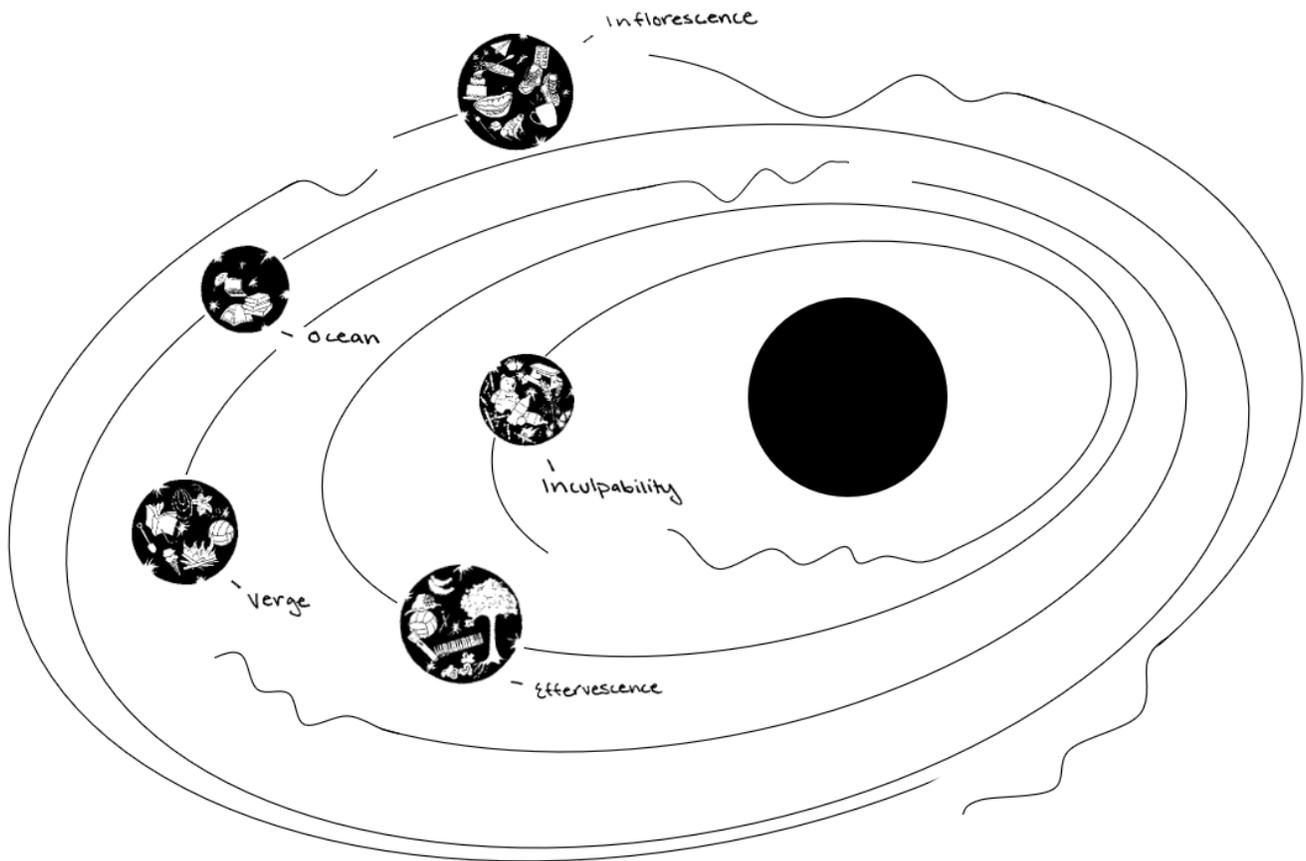


The pencil

with the absent eraser
and untouched lead.

Beige tiled floor. Cold, blue plastic chairs with attached desks. The nagging anxiety that comes from this cold building. The tightness, the impenetrable shell around myself. Nobody here knows me even though some would consider me a friend. I sit in front of _____, her blond hair spilling out, always getting caught in those metal pieces on the back of the chair. Getting stuck and then ripping out when she moves. Papers are handed out by Mr. _____. It's asking questions on _____. The sound of pencils on paper. A guy behind me asks for my answers. _____ in the next row over says with a crooked smile "don't mess with her, she could probably beat you up." The guy who asked for my answers goes back to his. I guess my shell looked as thick and black as lead.

I have been thinking a lot about memory lately. Memories orbit inside my head, drifting in and out of my conscious mind. Just like my forgetfulness, there are huge gaps in my memory. Whole stretches of time that feel like they have been blurred and smudged until they are inaccessible. Years. Months. Weeks. Not quite gone but not quite here either. Space and time mottled with the dark heaviness of some unknown intruder. Growing full and heavy with nostalgia, friends ask with a laugh, “Do you remember when we did ____?” There is a tickle of memory and then... nothing. “Can you tell me the story?” It’s strange having snippets of your life told back to you by another person. Things given back to you in the same color, just with a different hue. It’s strange having lost things that were built so beautifully in the moment, those moments having been linked with my emotions and my experience of that thing. But these castles of memory have been lost in the fog of my mind. This brain fog is like swimming through clouds in a nightmare, moving and moving but never going forward. This brain fog is like a glitching video game character who is stuck, trying to walk into a wall, legs still moving forward over and over again. This brain fog is like fishing all day in murky dark waters and never catching anything. This brain fog is a spaceship that no longer works.



What creating a memory feels like:

the sharpening of a camera as it focuses

eating honey

cleaning out the gunk from the sink drain

a good night's sleep

laughter

the sound of the pencil across paper

the turn of a paper page

sticking a pin on a map

getting a haircut

eating a lemon

accidentally squishing a bug

smiling

drinking tea on a cold day

making s'mores

What traveling to a memory feels like:

putting in the final puzzle piece

spring mornings at sunrise

the color blue

a hairbrush caught in a tangle of hair

the smell of peppermint

a swarm of bees on the rosebush in the dead of summer

an aquamarine spring

the smell of motor oil and the sound of an engine revving

bird wings
a time machine
the smell of old books
swimming
racing Usain Bolt
piercing clouds with a knife
getting the peanut butter off the roof of your mouth
a hot bath
watching sunset over the ocean
flying

What it's like to overwrite a memory with a new, imaginary one:

~~We held hands in the dark light.~~

What it's like to have memories but not be able to access them:

navy
hand
ceiling light
mumble
badges
bottle
waiting
phone
hospital
how long?

What it's like to lose a memory:

sticking your tongue in the gaping hole of a missing tooth

fries without salt

losing your housekey

dreaming of falling off high objects

finding a hole in the armpit of your favorite shirt

a widowed swan

the blank page as you sit down to write

a drooping plant

rain through the gutters

the empty shell of a cicada

a broken lightbulb

an empty house

a casket without flowers

I have forgotten some of the past, I will forget some of the eventual past I am creating in the present. I will forget to take out the trash, I will forget to take my clothes up the stairs, I will forget to clean up my papers strewn across the table. Memory is a gift, an obscure type of magic that found its way in the caverns of our bodies. But with a loss of memory comes an opportunity. An opportunity to learn to live for the now because soon the now will become the past and therefore, hazy and nondescript. The now is in focus, crisp, clear, unmarred by the passage of time. Free of gaps and hole. Larger than life. Full of beauty and promise.

What living in the moment feels like:

spicy pine scent on the breeze

twinkling eyes

rough dirt under fingertips

making paper airplanes

the tickle of laughter

the absence of time

the tickle of a caterpillar on your leg

tangy spice of curry on the tongue

the ring of a voice

a bubble not ready to pop

the strike of an asteroid against a planet.