Brainstorming: Questions to Focus Your Thoughts

When you do not have ideas/need more ideas:

- **Define key terms** from the assignment sheet. Examples: "democratic practices" "sacred places". What makes something democratic? What makes something sacred?
- **Think about what the opposite would be** of these key terms to help develop your definition. What is the opposite of democratic? What is the opposite of sacred?
- **Think about the broader implications** of the topic using questions like:
  - Who would this question matter to?
  - Why would this question matter to them?
  - What are the implications of this question?
  - If you can't answer these questions, start with a broad question and gradually narrow the scope:
    - Why is this course topic important in life/society?
    - How does this paper topic compare to the last?
    - What have you learned about this person/concept since the last paper or exam you had?
    - Who among those you've studied would this benefit, harm, etc.?
    - Who among those you've studied would support/oppose this concept?

When you need to support your idea:

- **Generate examples and counter-examples**. Try grounding the theoretical in the practical as a way of discovering what you understand and have to say about the topic.
  - For example, maybe you have to write about "sacred space in public places." List public places and sacred places you have visited. Write details about each one: the design, the sounds, the location, the feeling, etc. If you can find a concrete example of a space you thought felt sacred, you can use it to write about larger, more abstract concepts like how humans define sacred spaces or why humans need sacred spaces.
- **Paraphrase a key quote** from the text or from your lecture notes on the topic as a way of getting your ideas flowing.
- **Use a dictionary or thesaurus** as a way to generate language to describe what you know about the topic.