

## Handout 1: Journal Assignments

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Complete the following journal assignments when you are instructed to do so by your teacher.

### Journal 1

Listen carefully to the audio story, and jot down answers to the following questions:

- What is the story about?
- Who is telling the story?
- Why do you think the storyteller chose to tell this story?
- What do you “take away” from the story, or how does it make you feel?

Think about the story, and add any other thoughts that occur to you. Be prepared to share your responses with the class.

### Journal 2

Read the following quotation:

Personal narrative gives us a storyline. It helps us see how we belong, how we are—or aren't—safe in the world, and how we love, how we fear, how we want to change, too . . . Personal narrative reveals to us our hearts and gives us all we need to know to understand ourselves and one another. I always say, it's hard to make someone your enemy when you have shared your stories honestly with one another.

—Deborah Wiles

Write one or two paragraphs in response to Deborah Wiles's ideas about writing about ourselves. You can use the questions below to guide you, but feel free to present your own ideas about the value of writing personal narratives or memoir as well:

- What might it mean for your life to have a “storyline”?
- Which statement or statements of Wiles's do you most strongly identify with, and why?
- Do you disagree with anything she says? Why?
- What else do you think is valuable about writing about your own life?

### Journal 3: Character Video Observation

Write a chronology of the incident you have chosen for your memoir. The chronology should be a brainstorm of all your ideas, so don't worry about whether everything is important or whether it will all be part of your final memoir. Just write down everything you can remember about the incident in chronological order.

And don't just write about the physical actions, such as "I walked six blocks to the store" or "I bought a magazine." Write about what you remember *seeing*, *thinking*, and *feeling* as things were happening. If there were any smells or sounds, or if you remember touching or tasting anything, include those sensations too.

While you're writing, you may remember something that occurred earlier in the chronology. If this happens, just draw an arrow to where the new item belongs in the sequence.

## Handout 2: Unit Overview

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### Everyone Has a Story

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*Have you ever said to a friend, “You’ll never guess what happened to me!” and then proceeded to relate a story based on your own experience? Even if you never wrote it down, what you were telling was a little piece of autobiography, the story of your life. Authors write stories about their lives all the time. If they change enough of the details, the finished piece might end up being a work of fiction. But if they stick to their memory of what really happened, the result will be an autobiography or a memoir.*

*What gives us such a strong desire to tell stories about ourselves? Some people may have experienced a life-changing event or gone through a difficult struggle. Maybe they lost—or found—something precious to them, or overcame daunting challenges to become a leader in their community. Some people may want to tell humorous stories from their childhood, or write about their relationships to special people or places. No matter what prompts us to create and share our personal narratives, through the telling and the listening we learn something deeper about ourselves and what connects us to the world and to one another.*

*What stories do you have to tell?*

*Here are some of the questions you’ll explore in this unit:*

- How do writers craft interesting stories from their lives?
- What are the characteristics of a memoir?
- How can I make a personal story compelling for other people?

### What You Will Do in This Unit

**Learn what makes an anecdote worth remembering.** Listen to audio stories and to your classmates to discover the elements that keep you riveted.

**Experience real-life struggles of some master writers.** Peer through the window into some fascinating lives.

**Delve into your past for the seeds of stories.** What interesting stories have you lived, and why are they important to you? Will they make your audience laugh, learn something new, or cry along with you?

**Craft a mesmerizing memoir of your own.** Use the storytelling elements that professional writers use to spice up your stories and keep your audience on the edge of their seats.

## Project Description

For the unit project, you will write a short memoir in which you relate a significant or dramatic incident or moment from your life. You will begin by selecting several potential story ideas, and then work in a group to choose the best one for writing and polishing as a memoir. You will apply literary techniques, such as narrative arc, point of view, characterization, and the use of sensory and figurative language, to make your personal story engaging to an audience. As part of the process, you will critique your own work and then read your revised memoir aloud to a partner to learn how to make it even more compelling.

## Vocabulary Used in This Unit

**Anecdote:** A short narrative that tells about an interesting or amusing incident; often biographical or autobiographical.

**Audience:** A group of people who listen to, read, or view a piece of writing, or a work of art or media. An audience can be as small as a single person, or it can encompass the entire reading or viewing public.

**Autobiography:** A book that tells the story of the author's life. Autobiographies differ from memoirs in that they include the subject's entire life, or at least the most significant portions of it; they generally span a longer time period and are larger in scope.

**Biography:** A book that tells the story of a person's life other than the author's. Biographies may be collaborations between authors and subjects, or they may be written without the assistance or support of the people they are about.

**Chronology:** An arrangement of items in the order of their occurrence. A chronology of a day begins with what happens first thing in the morning and ends with what happens last at night.

**Memoir:** A true story that usually recounts just one aspect of an author's life—often, a life-changing event, the fulfillment of a dream, a physical or emotional struggle, or an insight about a special person, place, or time.

**Narrative arc:** The main plot of a story, including the high and low points of the action and turning points or moments of suspense.

## Assessment Checklist: Memoir

Use this assessment to help you write and revise your memoir. Make sure to include all the requirements. Your teacher will use this assessment to evaluate your work.

Requirements	Percentage of Total Grade	Comments	
Memoir		Student Comments	Teacher Comments
<b>Narrative Structure.</b> Has a narrative arc, with strong beginning, middle, and ending, including a clear high point in the action or a moment of revelation.	40%		
<b>Reflection.</b> Reveals why the author has chosen this moment or incident to write about and what it means to him or her.	20%		
<b>Characteristics of Memoir.</b> Uses first-person point of view, characterization, figurative and sensory language, and other characteristics of memoirs that are appropriate to the story.	30%		
<b>Writing Mechanics.</b> Demonstrates proper grammar, punctuation, and sentence and paragraph structure.	10%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>		

## Handout 3: What's It All About?

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Memoir Title \_\_\_\_\_ Pages \_\_\_\_\_

For each memoir excerpt, answer the following questions.

1. What is the memoir excerpt about?
  - What is the major conflict, issue, or situation on which the story centers?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - How does the story begin?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - What happens next? (List all the important events in the story. Put a check next to the event that you think represents the high point of the action or the moment of revelation.)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - How does the story end?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Draw the narrative arc to include the beginning and ending of the story, the high point or moment of revelation, and any important events that happen in between.

2. What do you learn about the person telling the story?

3. Why do you think the storyteller chose to tell this story?

4. What do you take away from the story, or how does it make you feel? (Do you identify with any of the author's experiences? Describe.)

## Handout 4: Tell an Anecdote

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Choose *five* prompts to complete by describing something that really happened to you.

1. The most embarrassing moment of my life was . . .
2. The hardest thing I ever did was . . .
3. I laughed so hard when . . .
4. One place I went that I'll never forget is . . .
5. I don't think I've ever been so scared as when . . .
6. If I could choose one thing to do over again, it would be . . .
7. The first time I knew I had a true friend was when . . .
8. I felt proud when . . .
9. The nicest thing anyone ever did for me was . . .
10. I've never felt happier than when . . .



## Handout 5: Developing Memoir Ideas

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### Step 1: Pick three ideas to develop.

You now have five possible ideas for your memoir. Choose three to develop further. Remember, the stories do not have to be dramatic or earth-shattering—but, as Roald Dahl said, they should be stories that you have never been able to get out of your mind.

To help you choose your ideas, answer the following questions:

- Which ideas do I remember most clearly and with the most detail?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Which ideas suggest a story with a beginning, middle, and ending?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Which ideas offer an opportunity to use other storytelling elements, such as characterization, setting, and sensory language?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Which ideas are most meaningful to me and would I most like to explore further?

### Step 2: Come up with working titles for your three ideas.

Idea 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Idea 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Idea 3: \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 3: Jot down notes in answer to the questions below for each idea.

Idea title: \_\_\_\_\_

What will the memoir be about?

Why do I want to tell this story? (What does it mean to me? How might it have meaning for someone else reading the story?)

Who will the characters be?

Where will the story take place? (Write down a few descriptive words or phrases.)

What other storytelling elements can I use to make the memoir interesting or engaging?

## Handout 6: The Critical Response Process

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There are many different ways to give and receive feedback. One method that writers and artists sometimes use is the Critical Response Process, which creates a safe and supportive environment in which to receive feedback on a completed work or work in progress.

### Quotations About Feedback

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Before you learn about the Critical Response Process, think about the following questions: Why is feedback important? What good does it do?

The following are some quotations from artists and writers with different opinions about feedback:

*Any artist that asks for advice is interested in doing more, being more, going further. Ultimately there should be a target in mind, and understanding this target is an important part of giving advice.* (David Oleski, painter)

*Criticism should not be . . . all knife and root-puller, but guiding, instructive, inspiring.* (Ralph Waldo Emerson, writer)

*I hear all comments and criticisms around me. I chew on them. I'm nourished by the ones that I decide work for me and spit out the others.* (Kelly Borsheim, sculptor)

*We artists stick ourselves out. This in itself deserves respect.* (Robert Genn, painter)

### Steps in the Critical Response Process

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The Critical Response Process comprises three steps:

1. The audience comments on something engaging about the idea or work. These comments should not judge or criticize. (For example, "That situation is so funny [interesting, surprising, touching, informative, or otherwise meaningful].")
2. The writer asks the audience open-ended questions about something specific. (For example, a writer wouldn't ask, "Do you like this idea?" but would ask instead, "What do you like about this idea? How could I make this character funnier? What can you relate to in this story?")
3. The audience asks neutral (i.e., judgment-free) questions of the writer. (For example, the audience doesn't ask, "Why is your story so sad?" but rather, "I'm interested in the emotion in this piece. How do you imagine your audience will feel?" Or rather than ask, "Why did you end the story so suddenly?" the audience might say, "I'm curious about the way the story ends. What effect would you like to produce?")

As you provide feedback, try to start sentences with phrases such as the following:

I notice . . .

I'm curious about . . .

I'm interested in . . .

I wonder . . .



## Handout 7: Writing Your Memoir

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Follow the steps below to create a first draft, edit your work, and create a polished second draft. You will need:

- Your notes on your chosen memoir idea (Step 3 on Handout 5)
- Your memoir chronology (Journal 3)
- The list of characteristics of a successful memoir

### Step 1: Consider your focus.

Decide what is most meaningful to you about the memoir idea you have chosen. Think also about what a reader or listener might take away from your memoir. Put a check mark next to the one or two phrases that best describe your focus:

- Telling a funny, exciting, or bizarre story
- Sharing a personal insight or discovery
- Describing a special person or place
- Capturing a magical moment
- Processing an interesting experience
- Exploring an emotional or physically challenging situation
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 2: Choose what to include.

**Chronology.** Decide which items in your chronology will contribute to and reinforce your chosen focus. Label each item in the chronology with an “A” (very important), “B” (somewhat important), or “C” (unimportant or potentially confusing).

You will probably want to eliminate items labeled C before you begin writing.

**Characteristics.** Review the list of characteristics of a successful memoir. Ask yourself: Which of these characteristics will strengthen my story?

Some characteristics, such as first-person voice or vivid description, you will definitely include. Others, such as dialogue or suspense, are optional and will depend on the story you want to tell.

### Step 3: Write your first draft.

Start writing! Refer to your notes from Handout 5, your chronology, and your list of characteristics of a successful memoir. Your chronology will help you remember what you want to include, though the process of writing may bring even more details to mind. And remember—what you write first will not necessarily be the beginning of your memoir.

Don't worry about getting your first couple of sentences or even the first paragraph or two perfect on the first draft. What's important is to keep writing until you have everything down on paper that you might be able to use. It is often easier to cut when you have too much material than to add more details to "beef up" a completed draft.

### Step 4: Edit your first draft

Before you get feedback from your peers, you should review your own work. Read over your first draft. Sketch the narrative arc below, including the story's beginning and ending and the important events that happen in between. Mark the high point in the action, or the moment of revelation, as well as where you reflect on the story's meaning.

Use the questions below and your narrative arc diagram to help you revise your first draft:

- How can I make the memoir's beginning and ending stronger? Is there a better place to start or finish telling the story?
- Is the high point of the story, or moment of revelation, clear? If not, how can I make it more vivid, dramatic, or emotional?
- How can I make my characters, including myself, seem more well-rounded and real?
- Where can I add more descriptive or sensory language?
- Have I included all the characteristics of a successful memoir that seem appropriate to my story? Could I add something to strengthen the take-away for my audience (humor, suspense, interesting or poignant details)?
- Is there any part of the memoir that doesn't contribute to my story or meaning? If so, where can I cut words and make the language more concise and clear?

Mark up your first draft with any edits, additions, and rearrangement of material. Be tough on yourself. You want to create the best piece you can.

### Step 5: Revise your draft.

Go over your draft, incorporating any changes you decided on in Step 4. Correct any additional spelling, grammatical, or usage errors you catch to produce a polished second draft.

