

Name: _____

Writing a Memoir

SOL 7.8 The student will edit writing for correct grammar, capitalization, punctuation,

spelling, sentence structure, and paragraphing.

SOL 7.7 The student will write in a variety of forms with an emphasis on exposition, narration, and persuasion.

Overview:

For this writing assignment, you will be the author of a highly reflective and personal piece of writing. You will focus on a small moment from your past which establishes some sort of significant meaning in your life. This moment should be one that has made you who you are today, or shaped your way of thinking.

Requirements:

- ☐ A well-written 3-6 paragraph memoir with a strong lead and a strong conclusion.
- ☐ Typed in black 12 point Arial or Tahoma font, double-spaced.
- ☐ A creative and reflective title centered at the top of your paper with your name and block number centered under the title.
- ☐ At least 2 uses of external dialogue (there can also be internal dialogue, which are thoughts and should be italicized).
- ☐ Imagery and figurative language throughout your memoir. Show your story, don't tell it.
- ☐ Review the requirements listed on your rubric.

What is a Memoir?

"Memoir is how writers look for the past and make sense of it. We figure out who we are, who we have become, and what it means to us and to the lives of others: a memoir puts the events of a life in perspective for the writer and for those who read it. It is a way to validate to others the events of our lives- our choices, perspectives, decisions, responses.

Memoir recognizes and explores moments on the way to growing up and becoming oneself, the good moments and the bad ones. It distills the essence of the experience through what the writer includes and more importantly, through what a writer excludes. Memoir celebrates people and places no one else had ever heard of. And memoir allows us to discover and tell our own truths as writers."

-Nancie Atwell, *In the Middle*, Heinemann (1998), p. 372

Questions to Ask Yourself:

1. What is my purpose?

2. Who is my audience?

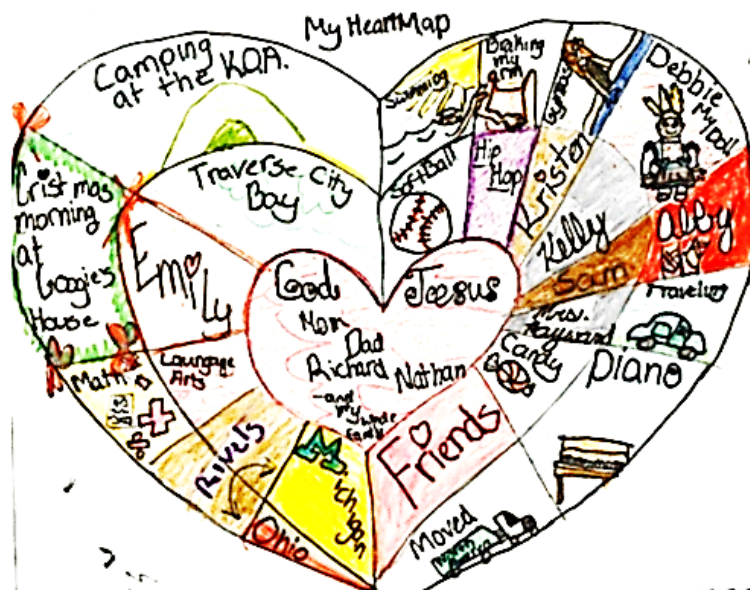
3. How is memoir different from other genres?

4. How will I get my audience to visualize my writing?

Heart-Mapping (“Gathering Seeds”)

When you’re writing a memoir, it’s important to choose a moment or topic that is close to your heart. In your writer’s notebook, you are going to “map-out” your heart. Think about things (*places, possessions, memories*) and people in your life that you **absolutely** couldn’t live without—these things should go in the center. Then, think about things that are important to you, but that you could *maybe* sacrifice to keep one of those items you placed in the center of your heart. Work your way from the inside, out.

Here is an example:



Step 1: Write down at least 3 significant moments which you would like to expand on (refer to your heart map).

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Step 2: To choose the right moment, ask yourself the following questions about *each* of the 3 moments you have identified above:

- ❖ Is this subject (person, place, thing, or animal) really important to me now or in the past?
- ❖ Do I have strong feelings about this subject? (Does it make you feel very, happy/sad/mad/excited/hopeful/inspired/regretful etc.?)
- ❖ Do I have stories to share about myself and this subject? In other words, do I have enough to say about it?
- ❖ Will I enjoy writing about this?
- ❖ What is the most important thing I want my audience to know about my subject?
- ❖ How did this event affect you (how did it change you or your way of thinking)?

- ❖ What's my "so what"? Why does this moment matter? Why should my reader care?

Circle the moment you decide is right.

*****If you can't think of a topic, refer to page 5 of this packet for inspiration!***

Step 3: Once you've chosen your significant moment, take a "mental snapshot" of it. Come up with **six** descriptive details or adjectives that will make your moment come alive! Remember to appeal to the 5 senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch/feel).

1. _____
—
2. _____
—
3. _____
—

4. _____
—
5. _____
—
6. _____
—

Possible Memoir Topics

Objects:

- ❖ A favorite blanket
- ❖ A car that you worked on with your dad
- ❖ A favorite stuffed animal
- ❖ A rock/seashell you found on vacation
- ❖ A special tree
- ❖ A swing-set
- ❖ A grandfather clock
- ❖ Your grandfather's chair
- ❖ Your grandmother's cooking
- ❖ A Christmas tree
- ❖ A favorite shirt/dress/pair of shoes
- ❖ A picture in your room
- ❖ A book
- ❖ A bicycle
- ❖ A baseball mitt

- ❖ The kitchen
- ❖ A special or secret place to play outside
- ❖ A tree-house
- ❖ A place you always went for vacation
- ❖ A church
- ❖ A park
- ❖ A school

People:

- ❖ Mom or dad
- ❖ Grandma or grandpa
- ❖ A cousin, aunt, uncle, sister, or brother
- ❖ A friend
- ❖ A teacher
- ❖ A preacher
- ❖ A neighbor

Places:

- ❖ A house you lived in/live in
- ❖ Your grandparent's house
- ❖ A barn
- ❖ A creek/river/pond

Questions to ask yourself:

- ❖ At age ____, what was the most important object I owned?
- ❖ Where is a place I spent a lot of my time when I was younger?

- ❖ Where did you always go (or still go) to think and “get away from it all”?
- ❖ Who was the most important person to you at age ____? Why?
- ❖ Who taught you the most in your life? What important lessons did they teach you?
- ❖ Who or what did you take for granted?

Start Strong! (Writing a Lead)



It is important to have a strong lead or hook when you are writing a memoir because it establishes the direction your writing will take. A good lead grabs the reader's attention and *refuses* to let go. In other words, it hooks the reader. Below are some ideas on how to write an interesting lead. Experiment with the different types in your writer's notebook and choose the one that works best for you.

1. **Announcement**

Open with an announcement about what is to come. However, **do not** insult the reader by saying something like, "I am going to tell you about ..."

Example: The day my sister threw up on the sailor's hat was a day that I'll always remember.

2. **Opinion**

Open with your opinion about the topic. (**No need to say**, "In my opinion" – we know it's your opinion.)

Example: No one should have to share a room with a little brother. Most little kids are pains in the neck, and they never listen.

3. **Quotation**

Open with a quotation from a character from the story or someone you know personally.

Example: When I was a child, my mom often said, "Leave it to Leslie." Oh, it wasn't anything mean or evil.

4. **Personal Experience**

Open with something that has happened to you, or a personal experience. It could be a part of the story, or it could be something that is not a part of what you are writing about but still relates to the topic.

Example: I never cried when my grandmother died. I hadn't been allowed to attend the funeral; my mother thought I was too young. I guess that is why I felt so sad the morning it happened.

5. **Figurative Language**

Begin with a simile, metaphor, or personification.

Example: The morning was like a dream. Fog hung low to the ground, making it difficult to see the creatures clearly. But I knew they were there, off in the distance, waiting for me.



Start Strong! (Writing a Lead) Cont.

6. **The Descriptive Lead**

The midsummer sun was high in a clear yellow-brown sky. The morning's filmy blue clouds had dissipated, and the temperature was 8 degrees Fahrenheit (from a piece by William Newcott).

7. **The Imagine Lead**

Imagine this, you are sitting at home watching a rerun of “Friends” when you are interrupted by a loud rapping at the door. You struggle to your feet, open the door, and are greeted by two police officers.

More Lead Examples:

The Dramatic/Mysterious Lead

I wouldn’t make it through the night without it.

Starting in the Middle of a Scene

I was sure we’d find the blanket ripped and dirty.

Leisurely Lead

When I looked into my Grandma’s linen closet, I was amazed by the patchwork of color. Never had I seen so many different blankets. There were soft, fluffy chenille ones and old worn brown ones. Some were still in their clear plastic wrap, while others seemed to sag off the edge of the shelf. Tucked in the middle, barely visible, with just a faded yellow corner sticking out, was the one I wanted.

Beginning at the Ending

I joyfully pulled the tattered corners around me and sighed as I settled into the corner of the chair.

Introducing the Narrator

I used to think I was different from everyone else – that I had a secret friend that no one else had. But as I’ve grown older and shared childhood memories with new friends, I’ve come to realize that lots of people had special relationships with inanimate objects. You know, that special bear, t-shirt, pillow, or, in my case, blanket? Yes, I admit it. I had a “blankie.”

The Misleading Lead

“Only insecure, immature babies need to drag their blankets around with them!”

Memoir Graphic Organizer

Hook:	
Introduction:	
Who?	
What?	
Where?	
When?	
Why?	
How?	
What happened?	How I felt/What I was thinking.
What happened?	How I felt/What I was thinking.
What happened?	How I felt/What I was thinking.
Closure/Insight/Reflection:	