

Louise Nayer: Winter 2019

Building a Great Memoir

Text: Barrington *Writing the Memoir*

Instructor will also send out excerpts from memoirs

Course Outline

Along with class discussion about specific elements of the memoir and in-class exercises, students share their writing with peers in small groups and get weekly critiques from the instructor. Students can submit up to three pages per week.

Week One—Sensory Detail

After getting to know each other a bit and a general introduction to memoir, the class will learn about sensory detail—and how using strong verbs, adjectives, adverbs and all the five senses can enhance your writing. Excerpts from successful memoirs and Barrington (Chpt. 7) will be discussed. Exercises show how to incorporate sensory detail into your writing and lead students to create vivid scenes.

Week Two—Scene and Summary

To create a great memoir, writing must move between scene and summary. We'll review Chpt. 5 in Barrington and again look at memoir excerpts. How does summary function as the “long shot” as in a movie and a scene as a more intimate portrayal? How does too much summary slow down the writing? How can you transition from summary to scene and back? Students will be given clear direction in how to write a summary and then a scene and thus transform their writing. Peer review.

Week Three--Dialogue

Scenes come alive with dialogue. How do you eliminate tag lines? How do you condense dialogue? When is it appropriate to use dialogue? Handouts on effective dialogue as well as excerpts from memoirs will clearly show students how to write great dialogue. Through exercises and prompts, students will then learn how to work on their scenes and make them come alive with their characters' voices. Peer review.

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Week Four—Time Shifts and Flash back

Do you always have to use past tense? How do you use flashback so it's not overdone? Where do you start and end your memoir? How do you create time lines to help you deal with "time"? We'll discuss Chpt. 6 in Barrington and the challenges of time shifts. Exercises will help students learn to seamlessly transition from present to past. Peer review.

Week Five—Voice—Engaging the Reader

The "voice" of the memoir writer is what carries the writing. What point of view do you choose? Does the voice sound clichéd or false? How do you find the true voice that will draw your readers into your story? How can you separate yourself from the "I" in the memoir thus creating the necessary distance to work on your piece. We'll go over memoir excerpts and later exercises to help you choose the right voice. Students may share work. Peer review.

Week Six—Review—Final class and Reading

Review of the basic elements of memoir writing. Handouts will help students continue on their path to weekly writing as well as a final class reading by students who wish to share their work with the class.