

Independent Reading Project #2

Literary Memoir

This time you will pick a literary memoir for your independent reading (see below for what is considered as a literary memoir). The only restriction is that it must have been published (for the first time) in the past 5 years. You need to decide on and purchase/check out your memoir as soon as possible and go ahead and begin reading it.

I will assume you have a copy of and have begun reading your memoir by April 2.

What is a Literary Memoir?

It originates in memory, in personal experience. And the contract with the reader is that you're telling the truth as you know it and have discovered it and believe it to be true. Usually takes a portion of a life; childhood, for example, or deals with a specific theme or experience – and disregards the rest of the life. Examples: *Angela's Ashes* about growing up impoverished in Limerick, Ireland; Mary Karr's *The Liar's Club* about a childhood in oil country in Texas in a dysfunctional family; or a serious challenge one faces such as an illness, catastrophe, crisis – Mark Doty's *Heaven's Coast*; *Girl, Interrupted*, Susana Kasen; death of a parent, Philip Roth's *Patrimony*; Katherine Rich's *The Red Devil – to Hell with Cancer and Back*. Being Catholic and a spiritual quest, *Virgin Time* by Patricia Hampl. Franzen's and Reeve Lindbergh dealing with their parents' Alzheimer's. Margaret Wurtele dealing with the death of her son; or a personal, cultural or racial exploration, such as Korean adoptee Jane Jeong Trenka trying to make sense of the dualities of being born Korean and raised in America, in MN, or Toi Derricot's *The Black Notebooks: an Interior Journey* about being a light-skinned black woman who confronts what it means to be a black woman living in a racially divided world, or Carolyn Heilbrun's *The Last Gift of Time: Life Beyond Sixty*. Or *Somewhere Towards the End*, by Diana Athill, written when she was 89, about being old. They can also cover experiences in the natural world, or living in a different, perhaps exotic locale, like Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa* ("I had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong Hills.") or capture an undramatic trip down a river on a houseboat, like Nessa Rapoport's *House on the River*, which is a meditation on memory, the past, the connection between generations.

Memoir is about the writer's experience even if it is "about" someone else. Example of *The Suicide Index*, by Joan Wickersham – about her father committing suicide, and exploring his life to figure out why, but it is **her experience** that she is recounting, what she experienced, thought, felt, what his death did to her and what she made of that. We identify and relate to her struggle as the one who had the experience.

It is **different** from a biography or traditional autobiography. It's not a step by step chronicle of a life; it's a reflection on one part of a life or one experience, usually written in a more creative way.

Assignment

1. 10 Points: Your Book Choice sheet (handed out in class today) is due on **April 2**.
2. 60 Points: Project/Presentation due **April 17 (Present 17-19)**. The possibilities for your project are endless. Should you come up with an original idea you like better than any of the ones below, go for it. Originality will be rewarded. Should you choose the original route, just run it by me before you get too far into the project. You will also present the project to the class.
3. 30 Points: Timed Writing (in class) using your book as an example. **April 22**

Some potential project ideas:

- Teach the class something about your book or about the author and/or things he/she has written
 - Use a series of monologues, dialogues, imaginary book lists, recipes, memos, role playing, a dramatic scene, or a scrapbook.
 - Use music, art prints, maps, a video presentation or an imaginary radio show (podcast)
 - Use newspapers, photos, pantomime, sculpture, puppets, or a diorama
- Make your own live-action movie or create an animated film using a sequence from your book
- Use a computer multimedia program (PowerPoint, etc.) to build an interactive resource about your book and/or author