

Memoir
Upper Grades Classroom



Goals and teaching points for Memoir Unit

1. Students will be able to define and identify characteristics of memoir.
2. Students will generate memories and ideas for a theme or focus of their own memoir.
3. Students will develop the memoir using a lens.
4. Students will build scenes with dramatic narrative tension.
5. Students will revise their writing in order to reshape and make sense of their writing.
6. Students will reflect on their lives.

Mini-Lesson Focus	Key Concept	Resources Needed
<p><i>Day 1</i> Immersion: What do you notice about memoir?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide each group of students a smart stack of memoirs they will use to make noticings. (Students will use the same stack of books for the entire immersion phase of this unit of study.) • Each group will need to choose a note taker who will record the rest of the group's noticings. The note takers are not responsible for making noticings. Their only job is to take notes. Every member of the group will have a chance to be the notetaker by the end of the unit. • Students must say something like, "Memoirs have..." Some memoirs have..." "A memoir might..." • On day one students should only look on the outside of the book to make their noticings. No one is allowed to go inside the book on this day. <p>Share: Each group will share one noticing to add to the list. Homework: Make notebook entries about vivid memories you have.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart stacks of memoir for each group • Markers • Notebook paper and pens • Chart paper for listing noticings • Student writing notebooks
<p><i>Day 2</i> Immersion: What do you notice about memoir?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide who will be the note taker for the day's noticings. The same rules apply to the note taker every day. • Students must say something like, "Memoirs have..." Some memoirs have..." "A memoir might..." • Students are allowed to open their memoirs to make noticings. They are not allowed to go past the title page, and can only look at the flaps and end pages in the back of the book. • With any additional writing time students should be getting memories into their notebooks. <p>Share: Each group will share one noticing to add to the list. Homework: Make notebook entries about vivid memories you have.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart stacks of memoir for each group • Markers • Notebook paper and pens • Chart paper for listing noticings • Student writing notebooks
<p><i>Day 3</i> Immersion: What do you notice about memoir?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide who will be the note taker for the day's noticings. The same rules apply to the note taker every day. • Students must say something like, "Memoirs have..." Some memoirs have..." "A memoir might..." • Students are allowed to look at the entire book to make noticings today. • With additional writing time students should be getting memories into their notebooks. <p>Share: Each group will share one noticing to add to the list. Homework: Make notebook entries about vivid memories you have.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart stacks of memoir for each group • Markers • Notebook paper and pens • Chart paper for listing noticings • Student writing notebooks
<p><i>Day 4</i> Immersion: Reverse Noticing The Lens</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain to the students that there is something you've noticed about memoir that they haven't yet noticed. Each memoir has a lens that the writer uses to give them a view about themselves. • Ask students to name items that have a lens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart stacks of memoir for each group • Markers • Notebook paper and pens • Chart paper for listing noticings • Student writing notebooks

	<p>(e.g. glasses, camera, magnifying glass, binoculars, etc...) What does the lens do? (Make things focused or clearer, put something between you and the object you are looking at, they make things closer or farther away, frame things)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain to students that a memoir's lens is a thing, a person, a place, an event or an idea. • You can usually decide on the lens of a memoir based on the title. The students' job today is to sort their books based on the lens of the memoir. <p>Share: Each group will share how they sorted their memoirs, being sure they can defend their thinking about how they sorted.</p> <p>Homework: Students should take a memoir from their stack and three post-it notes home. They are expected to become familiar with the book and make three noticings on their post-it notes that they can share with their group the next day.</p>	
<p><i>Day 5</i> Immersion: Reversed Noticing Reflection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If students haven't already noticed that all memoir have a reflection, and the reflection is usually at the end of the memoir tell them today. • Have students look for reflection in their memoir stacks. <p>Share: Each group should share one or two examples of reflection that they found in their stacks. They should also share how they know it is reflection.</p> <p>Homework: Students should take a different book from their stack and three post-it notes home. They are expected to become familiar with the book and make three noticings on their post-it notes that they can share with their group the next day.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart stacks of memoir for each group • Markers • Notebook paper and pens • Chart paper for listing noticings • Student writing notebooks
<p><i>Day 6</i> Immersion: Sorting Memoir Structures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explain to the class that memoir comes in many different structures. The groups' task today is to sort their stacks by structure. ▪ Share the different kinds of memoir structures you have noticed in the memoirs provided, and share an example of each. ▪ Groups will sort their stacks based on memoir structures. <p>Share: Groups share how they sorted the memoirs in their stacks and justify their decisions.</p> <p>Homework: Take another memoir from your stack home to read and become familiar with.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart stacks of memoir for each group • Markers • Notebook paper and pens • Chart paper for listing noticings • Student writing notebooks
<p><i>Day 7</i> Immersion: Sifting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The class will review the noticings they have made about memoir. Groups will work together to come up with a working definition of memoir, then share these definitions with the class. • Based on each groups' definition of memoir the class will come up with a working definition of memoir. • The class looked at different structures for memoir yesterday. Explain to them today that they will be making a memoir that is a series of vignettes. • Groups will sift out texts that are not memoir (red herrings). Students must defend their decisions about this. • They will also sift out memoir that is not like what they will be writing. (picture books, one episode, etc...) <p>Share: Groups will share their red herrings and justify their decisions about this. They will also share memoirs that are left in the stacks that are like what they will be writing.</p> <p>Homework: Think about the memoir you will use as your mentor text. Reread your notebook entries that are memories and begin to look for themes or connections between them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart stacks of memoir for each group • Markers • Notebook paper and pens • Chart paper for working definitions of memoir • Chart paper for listing noticings • Student writing notebooks

<p><i>Day 8</i> Choosing a Mentor Text Generating Notebook Entries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give students time to reread and discuss the memoirs that are left in their stacks. Today they will be expected to choose the memoir that they will use as a mentor for their own writing. • After selecting their mentor texts students should reread the memoir and look for parts that they love. • If there is time left during writing, students should look for a notebook entries that they might be able to connect for their memoir or write another memory in their notebook. <p>Share: Students share the mentor text they have chosen for the study and name one or two reasons for their decisions. Homework: Take your mentor text home and reread it. Look for places in the text that you love, and make note of what it is you love about it. Bring a candid photograph or two of you from when you were younger. Make sure that the other people in the picture are relatives or close friends.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small stacks of memoir that is like what the students will be making for each group • Markers • Notebook paper and pens • Chart paper for listing noticings • Student writing notebooks
<p><i>Day 9</i> Generating Notebook Entries: Writing from a photograph</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Share a photograph of you from your childhood and demonstrate writing a notebook entry from the picture. ▪ Have students share the photographs they brought to school that day with a partner and choose the one they will write from today. ▪ Before sending students off to generate notebook entries, hand out a list of questions they might ask themselves to help them write from their photograph. <p>Share: Students share with their writing partners some of the writing they did from their photograph.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candid photos from the students' pasts • Student writing notebooks and pens • List of questions students may ask themselves about their photographs
<p><i>Day 10</i> Generating Notebook Entries: A Significant Person in Your Life</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ask students to share examples from their mentor texts of authors writing about significant people in their lives. ▪ Consider what the author might have done to think about that person. Suggest that they might have asked themselves questions to help them think more deeply about that person. Demonstrate with a student or another teacher how asking yourself questions might help you think more deeply about a person. ▪ Have students find a notebook entry where they have written about a significant person or think about someone they might write about. ▪ Send kids off with a list of questions to help them write about that person. <p>Share: In groups students will share some of the work they did when thinking about a significant person. Homework: Take some time after school to pay close attention to someone in your family. Keep in mind the questions we asked ourselves in class. Make a notebook entry about that person.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of questions students may ask themselves about a significant person in their lives. • Student writing notebooks and pens
<p><i>Day 11</i> Collecting: Finding your theme: Trying different strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Share with the class that very soon each writer will be going from generating notebook entries to selecting a seed idea, and that there are a lot of different ways in which writers do this. ▪ Model with another writer/teacher how to discover a seed idea. (ex. Finding connections between notebook entries, marking small parts that stood out, etc.) ▪ Invite the writer/teacher to continue sharing her process for selecting a seed idea and ask students to think about what the writer has done that they might also do. Have students pair/share what they observed and might try. ▪ Send kids off to try some of these strategies to uncover their own seed idea or life topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student writing notebooks and pens • Chart paper and markers for lising strategies for uncovering a seed idea

	Share: Have one or two students share what they are thinking about their seed ideas, and how they came to their decisions.	
<i>Day 12</i> Collecting: Finding your theme (T-Chart)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate for students how to create a chart of possible themes that can be generated from memories that are written in your notebook (examples include: loss, nervousness, anger, perfectionism, difference, etc..) • Invite students to go off and discover possible themes in their own writing. <p>Share: Students may share 2 or 3 possible themes from their lists.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T-chart for finding your theme • Students writing notebooks and pens
<i>Day 13</i> Collecting: Looking at a different point of view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggest to writers that it can be helpful to consider a memory from multiple points of view. • Demonstrate how to choose a piece of writing and think about how to write from a different perspective. Make sure to think aloud about what another person may have been thinking or feeling during the event. You may even want students to <p>Share: Have students discuss some of the new thinking they did when they wrote their stories from different perspectives. Did anyone uncover something that might not have been uncovered otherwise?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student writing notebooks and pens
<i>Day 14</i> Collecting: Looking at yourself from a distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain to students that part of the hard work of memoir writing is to be able to step outside of your life to look at it. One way to do this is to think of yourself as a character in a story and ask yourself questions about that character's life. • Provide a list of questions that students might ask themselves and demonstrate how you might answer those questions about yourself. (Students can use the same list of questions that were provided earlier in this unit of study.) <p>Share: When you are conferencing with students determine one or two students who have uncovered something about him or herself and have them share with the group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ List of questions to ask about a significant person in your life ▪ Student writing notebooks and pens
<i>Day 15</i> Collecting: Developing your theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain to the class that they have been spending a lot of time this week thinking about possible themes they might think about when writing their memoir. Share with them the angle or focus for your own memoir, and think aloud how you might continue to dig deeper into the theme you have selected. Provide students with questions they might apply their themes. <p>Share:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions to apply to your theme • Student writing notebooks and pens
<i>Day 16</i> Planning: Looking at Memoir Structures (Shape)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Remind students of their investigation into memoir structures during the immersion phase of this unit of study. Explain that today they will be looking more closely at framing their memoirs with shape. ▪ Review the different shape structures of memoir including circle structure, snapshot structure, series of vignettes, and one event ▪ Invite students to categorize their mentor texts by the shape of the memoir. Students can then take some time to look at the different examples. ▪ Students should make a notebook entry where they try one of these structures for writing their memoir. <p>Share: Allow one or two students to share the structure that they tried and how it worked for their memoir.</p> <p>Homework: Complete this try it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chart of memoir structures ▪ Mentor texts ▪ Students' writing notebooks and pens
<i>Day 17</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Remind students of their investigation into 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students' mentor texts for memoir

<p>Planning: Looking at Memoir Structures (Contrast)</p>	<p>memoir structures during the immersion phase of this unit of study. Explain that today they will be looking more closely at framing their memoirs with contrast.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review the different contrast structures of memoir including every day/one day, then and now, inside me/outside me, ▪ Invite students to categorize their mentor texts by the shape of the memoir. Students can then take some time to look at the different examples. ▪ Students should make a notebook entry where they try one of these structures for writing their memoir. <p>Share: Allow one or two students to share the structure that they tried and how it worked for their memoir.</p> <p>Homework: Complete this try it.</p>	<p>along with specific examples of the structures used today</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student writing notebooks and pens
<p>Day 18 Planning: Looking at Memoir Structures (Framing Time)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Remind students of their investigation into memoir structures during the immersion phase of this unit of study. Explain that today they will be looking more closely at framing their memoirs with time. ▪ Review the different time structures of memoir including tense and skipping around. ▪ Invite students to categorize their mentor texts by the shape of the memoir. Students can then take some time to look at the different examples. ▪ Students should make a notebook entry where they try one of these structures for writing their memoir. <p>Share: Allow one or two students to share the structure that they tried and how it worked for their memoir.</p> <p>Homework: Complete this try it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students' mentor texts for memoir along with specific examples of the structures used today ▪ Student writing notebooks and pens
<p>Day 19 Planning: Including Story Elements in Your Memoir</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind students that most memoirs include elements of story such as scenes, dialogue and conflict, and that it will be important to use these elements in their writing of memoir. (These are things your class should have learned in previous units of study.) • Show students how you will plan the draft of your memoir by using a timeline, storyboard, or other graphic organizer. Indicate in your plan places where you might reveal conflict or elaborate a scene. • Send students off to plan their own memoir. Allow them to choose a planning tool that works for them. (Using graphic organizers and planning for writing should be something the students have learned in previous units.) <p>Share: Invite students to hold up their plans to show the class.</p> <p>Homework: Complete your plan if it wasn't completed in class.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Several organizers students have been introduced to in previous units of study that can be used to plan their drafts ▪ Writing notebooks and pens
<p>Day 20 Drafting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate how you will reread all of the work you have done related to the memoir you are about to write, and then put it all away. • Show students how they can use the plan they developed yesterday to begin drafting their memoirs. • Off they go! <p>Share:</p> <p>Homework: Complete your first draft if it wasn't completed in class.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft paper • Student writing notebooks and pens
<p>Day 21 Revision: Leads</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show the class several different lead paragraphs of published memoirs. Notice together how the author invited the reader into his story, how he catches the reader's eye. • Chart the class noticings and naming of strong memoir leads. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of published memoir beginnings. • Mentor and touchstone texts • Chart paper for noticing how memoirists craft strong leads

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send the class off to try at least five different beginnings. Have them pay attention to how their memoirs would change with each possible beginning, then choose the one they like best. <p>Share: Invite students share the lead paragraph that they like best.</p>	
<p><i>Day 22</i> Revision: Slowing Down Time in Your Writing by Acting Out a Section of your Memoir</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share an excerpt of the touchstone text where the Recruit a couple of students to act out a section of your memoir. Allow them a little time to prepare before the mini-lesson begins. (Make sure that the section you have the students act out has action and/or dialogue.) Explain to the class that when you have people act out your work it can help you to see if you have written what you intended to convey. After the students act out your piece of writing, share your thinking with the class about what you might change. Invite students to have their peers act out their work in an effort to see what changes they might want to make to their memoir. <p>Share: Pay attention to the work students are doing as they revise by acting out a section. Choose a couple students to share with the class how this exercise helped them to see how they might make changes in their memoir.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excerpt of the teacher's memoir Touchstone text excerpt where the author slowed down time. Memoir drafts and writing notebooks
<p><i>Day 23</i> Revision: Rearrange sections of your memoir</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain to students that it can be helpful to rearrange sections of your draft. Demonstrate to students how they can cut apart the large sections of their drafts and rearrange them. Students should pay close attention to the beginnings and endings of their drafts to match the new order of the memoir. <p>Share: Students can share in partnerships or small groups how rearranging their drafts changed them. Are the students happy with the new order or do they prefer the original order? Explain their thinking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two copies of each student's memoir. (One to cut up and rearrange)
<p><i>Day 24</i> Revision: Describe the internal and external you</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate for students how to choose two or three meaningful events from your memoir draft. Rewrite them to include what was happening to the external you and then again to include what was happening to the internal you. <p>Share:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memoir drafts Writing notebooks and pens
<p><i>Day 25</i> Revision: Tell someone your memoir</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show students how telling someone their memoirs can help them think of things they might want to add, take out or change. Make sure students understand that the idea is not to read the memoir out loud. In fact, students should do this exercise without looking at their written memoir. Provide recording devices so students can listen back to find new and different things to add to your draft. <p>Share: Have a discussion about how this exercise helped students revise their memoir drafts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recording device Memoir drafts
<p><i>Day 26</i> Revision: Choose a place to zoom in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show students how they can find a place in their memoir where they have only written one or two sentences about something important and write more about it. After students have selected a place where they can write more, they should write the sentence at the top of a notebook page, then push themselves to write at least two pages about that sentence. Reread what you have written to find things that may be useful in your draft. <p>Share: Invite student to share things they found to add</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memoir drafts Student writing notebook and pens

	to their memoirs when they wrote more about an important part.	
<i>Day 27</i> Revision: Endings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show the class several different final paragraphs of published memoirs. Notice together what the author did to make the story sound finished. • Chart the class noticings. • Send the class off to try at least five different endings. Have them pay attention to how each ending might make it necessary for other parts of their memoir to be changed. Have them choose the one they like best. <p>Share: Invite students share the ending that they like best.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of published memoir endings. • Mentor texts • Chart paper for noticing how memoirists craft strong leads
<i>Day 28</i> Editing and Publishing: Read your memoir aloud to someone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Remind students that reading their writing aloud can be a powerful way to help them think about changes they can make that will convey the meanings they intended. ▪ Students should work with their partners to read aloud their memoirs noting changes they can make to the work. <p>Share: Students will discuss how reading their memoir aloud, or listening to someone else reading it aloud helped them make changes to support the reader.</p> <p>Homework:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memoir drafts
<i>Day 29</i> Editing and Publishing: Editing Checklist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide your students a copy of an editing checklist. Make sure that there are components of memoir included on the checklist. (ex. Have a place where they name their lens, how they structured their memoir, one sentence that shows evidence of reflection.) ▪ Students must have their memoir edited and typed by the beginning of the next class. <p>Homework: Finish typing and editing your memoir. Bring it to school ready to include in the anthology tomorrow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Editing checklist • Memoir drafts
<i>Day 30</i> Celebration and Publishing: Making a Class Anthology	Create a class anthology. Provide each student with a copy of the anthology, put a copy in the school library and keep a copy in the classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A typed copy of each student's memoir

Adapted from: Bomer, K. (2005). *Writing a Life*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
and
Nia, Isoke. *Digging Deep: Genre Study in the Writer's Workshop*.