

The Essential Characteristics of Memoir

Adapted from Caulkins, L. (1991) Living between the lines.
Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational Books

Memoir-

What is it?

Why write it?

How do we start?

Where do we go from here?

What is it?

“A memoir is not what happens, but the person to whom things happen.” Virginia Woolf.

- Memoir is the genre of the decade
- Not just a chronological retelling of events - “My Life from Diapers to Dances”
- Places moments and events in the context of a life
- Renders the ordinariness of our lives so that it becomes significant
- Not the act of recording one’s life story but of composing it—of creating it
- Finding threads that weave the story of life into statement: “this is who I am”

Why write it?

“All we can give our children is a sense of story, of something caring and committed to carrying them through their lives.” David Booth

- To discover not only the moments of our lives but the meanings in those moments
- To find what memories reveal about who we are today and who we were
- If we allow ourselves to be moved by moments in our lives, then our readers will also be moved by them
- To move beyond mere reporting to the edge of dawning realization and wonder
- To celebrate our lives
- To find that the moments of our lives fit together, there is movement forward, and the pieces add up to something satisfying and whole