

MEMOIR LITERATURE CIRCLES





Hi!

I'm Lauralee, creator at [Language Arts Classroom](https://www.languageartsclassroom.com).

Thanks for downloading this memoir get-started-kit for literature circles.

Even if you don't teach **memoirs** with literature circles, you'll be able to use these materials.

Please contact me with any questions or success stories: lauralee@languageartsclassroom.com or connect:



WELCOME HOME

MEMOIR PRE-READING ACTIVITIES





PRE-READING



Activity One

Build on Prior Knowledge

Define “memoir,” and explain it is a type of **creative nonfiction**. List the different types of creative nonfiction such as braided essays, visual essays, and hermit crab essays. Memoirs are another type of creative nonfiction.

Ask students what they might expect from a memoir, an account of someone’s life with a narrow focus.

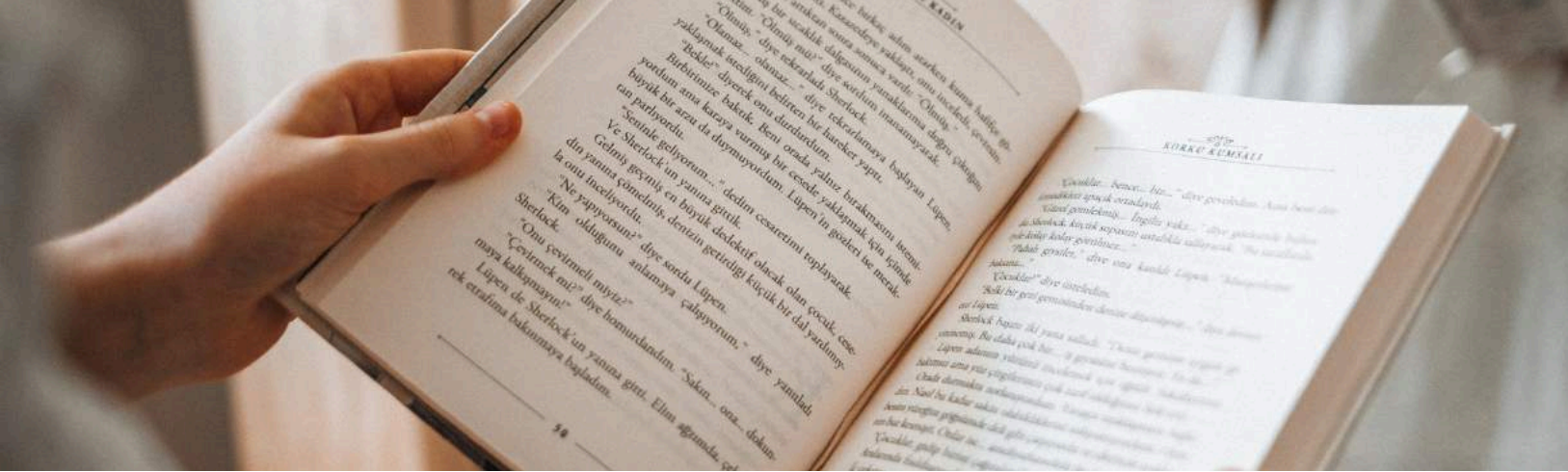
Students might say:

- Authenticity
- Entertainment
- Growth from the main character
- Other characters

Students might have questions about how nonfiction can be creative. With creative nonfiction, the story happened. The dialogue is recreated, and the story is told with pieces of fictional work added (alliteration, setting descriptions, and on). To get students brainstorming, you might have them add ideas on a Padlet.

The book *Tell It Slant* has pieces you can turn into excerpts. (It is illegal for me to post any excerpt.)

Finally, ask students if they have read any memoirs or personal essays. Often, memoirists write personal essays before they write a book.



PRE-READING



Activity Two

Present the Question: Whose story?

Give students sticky notes. Create headers around the room (on a chalkboard or with posters):

- What humans learn from stories.
- Where we hear stories.
- Whose stories we learn.

As students to answer the three questions as many times as they'd like. Students will probably realize that:

- Humans learn about their world through stories. Examples might include morals, rules, safety, patterns, and experiences.
- Humans hear stories by talking with others, by reading, and by viewing stories. Examples might include family gatherings, friendly conversations over social media or in the hallway, from the news, from movies and television, and through books.
- Humans hear stories from those who speak, act, and write.

PRE-READING



Activity Two: CONTINUED

Present the Question: Whose story?

Acknowledge the strong thinking students did, and praise them for realizing the various places they engage with stories. Students might mention their stories from youth, religious texts, and popular television shows.

Continue by highlighting places where stories are read: by parents/guardians, by teachers, and by caregivers. Show students the statistics on publishing. Discuss what happens when stories are not shared. Students might realize that learning from various people helps everyone to grow. Continue the discussion by acknowledging how students like to be heard and acknowledged.

Memoir sales have grown recently. Do people enjoy sharing their stories? Do others enjoy learning about others? What happens when we learn about others? Ask students to draw conclusions.

Finally, ask students about the power of hearing stories from others. Do they like watching other stories on social media? Do they enjoy sharing events with their friends? Capitalize on their interests in what they learn from seeing new perspectives.

Memoirs are a way of telling stories from many voices.

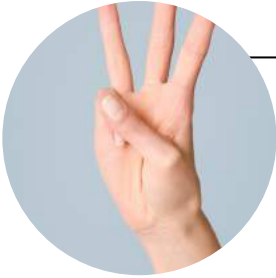


potential memoir
list!





PRE-READING



Activity Three

Readers' rights.

Review the features of memoirs, and then review the power of stories. If a book is marketed as a memoir, what do readers believe? Students might say that:

- The story happened.
- The memoirist is truthful, at least telling the truth as they see it.
- Some pieces are recreated, like dialogue.

Share an excerpt from James Frey's book, *A Million Little Pieces*. (Again, I cannot legally share an excerpt. Other **fake memoirs** exist.) Discuss the power of sharing stories, of revealing pieces of your life, and of overcoming adversity. Walk students through the story, and evaluate his writing.

Show students the clip of Oprah interviewing Frey concerning the falsehoods in his memoir.

What are students' responses? Who is responsible for telling the truth in memoirs? Where does the line between "creative" and "nonfiction" start?

Close the activity by asking students to create a list of "readers' rights" concerning memoirs. What do readers have the right to expect when reading someone else's story?

You might compile these answers or create a community list. Consult the list as you work through the stories.

MEMOIR TEACHER PLANNING





PLANNING



Approximately Four Weeks

Organize your literature circles.

Whatever books you use for your memoir circles, give an overview of each one, almost a book talk.

Potential books:

The Glass Castle

The Color of Water

Down These Mean Streets

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Educated

For these books, I give a mini-book-talk to sell the book. I record students' answers on a Google Form.

For annotating, I ask students to annotate concerning: dwelling situations, substance abuse, child neglect, poverty, and discrimination. In some form, most memoirs cover these concepts.

Reading

Divide page numbers by reading days. I personally do not give lots of homework, but instead, I have reading and working days.

I also consider my students' needs. These memoir circles run me three-four weeks.



PROCESS: RUNNING LITERARY CIRCLES

Approximately Three-Four Weeks

Combine reading, discussion, and analysis.

Our work days revolve around a mix of questions. Students sit in their group (designated by the book) and work through questions.

Tips:

- √ Use a variety of questions. I have questions for postmodern works and questions specific to memoirs.
- √ Student-generated questions work too. Open a blank document and ask students to add questions to it.
- √ Use students' annotations as discussion starters.

After students work together in their groups one or two times, ask them to present an overall idea of the content to the class. As students read the memoirs, they will see overlap of dwelling situations, substance abuse, child neglect, poverty, and discrimination. Why would people write about these concepts? Can students be empowered to take action? Does the sharing of a story do so?

Possible Extension Activities:

1. *Add a digital or physical chart of the annotations.* The chart can become a discussion that relates to students' understanding of the world. How can they recognize these stories and experiences?
2. *Begin building understanding for literary analysis.* Memoirs allow for literary analysis and if your final activity will have students write one, students can begin acquiring details for their topic.
3. *Circle back.* The sticky note and Padlet activities from the pre-reading activities work well to close out classroom conversations.

SUMMATIVE: LITERARY ANALYSIS

Approximately One Week

Standards, topics, drafting, and polishing.

Possible topics:

- Language/syntax (and its effects on the story)
- Growth of protagonist (and methods of getting there, perhaps overcoming the adversities from annotations)
- Author's structural choices (and their contribution to the theme)

Those prompts are directly connected to standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

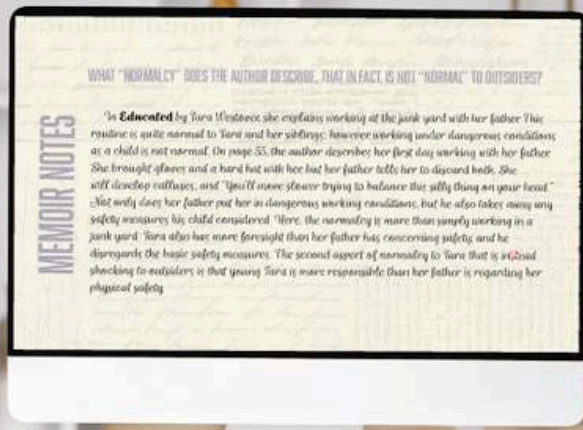
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

completely editable



MEMOIR QUESTIONS

50 QUESTIONS

Memoir Activity

Editable questions for any memoir.

LITERATURE ASSESSMENT

self-grading Google Form



Pre-reading Assessment

Self-grading, editable Google Form.

LITERATURE QUESTIONS

— for modern stories —



Modern Questions

Activity for any modern story.

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