

## Common Core Lesson Plan

By Michael Cook

**Title of the Lesson:** *Writing Home: Using Personal Memoir with Life Story*

**Grade Level:** *English III/IV—11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades*

**Length of Lesson:** *The memoir lesson and activities will take*

**Overview of the Lesson:** *In one sentence, summarize what will happen in this lesson.*

**Learning Goals:** *All student learning goals are included below, embedded in their corresponding standards.*

**NC Common Core Standards Being Addressed:** This lesson addresses CCR Anchor Standards 3-6. The grade-specific standards met are as follows:

*W.9-10.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.*

- The student will be able to create a memoir that engages the reader in a smooth progression of experiences or events in their lives that reflect the students' personal understanding of home.
- The student will be able to apply narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- The student will be able to use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
- The student will be able to write a conclusion that reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the memoir.

*W.9-10.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.*

- Students will apply scenes and dialogue that bring memories to life on the page.
- Students will recognize and implement the attributes/characteristics that make a story a universal story.

*W.9-10.5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience*

- Students will apply the writing workshop and student/teacher conferencing to produce focused revision and drafting.

W.9-10.6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

- Students will learn and demonstrate skill using technology (Google Docs and the course Moodle) to collaborate with peers and participate in an online writing workshop model.
- Students will publish finished memoirs through varied media, including class website, local newspaper, etc.

W.9-10.10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

- Students will use writing assignments, including the memoir, to exemplify the evocative, connective, and reflective aspects of connecting with texts (Wilhelm & Novak, 2011).

21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Addressed:

1. Learning and Innovation

- Students will use a wide range of idea creation techniques.
- Students will elaborate, refine, analyze and evaluate their own ideas in order to improve and maximize creative efforts.
- Students will develop, implement and communicate new ideas to others effectively.

2. Communication and Collaboration

- Students will communicate effectively in diverse environments.

<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/ready> READY Features Information for New Standards and Accountability Model. The READY website is a new one-stop information center that directs teachers, parents and principals to resources and references regarding the Common Core State Standards, the Essential Standards and the proposed READY Accountability model. Stop by the new site to learn more about the new standards that will be implemented in fall 2012.

<http://www.wcpss.net/curriculum-instruction/race-to-the-top/Combined-Common-Core.pdf>

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<http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards/history-social-studies/grades-9-10/>

**Materials Needed:**

- *Mentor texts (published and unpublished memoirs for students to read and discuss)—two suggestions are provided below.*
- *October Sky (Hickam, 2000)*

- *The Coalwood Way (Hickam, 2001)*
- *Internet access*
- *Gmail accounts for all students*
- *Class Moodle, website, or other online vehicle for student interaction*
- *Memoir rubric—created in class with student input*

**How the Lesson Will Flow:** Please see attachment for resources and further explanation of assignment.

### **Day 1:**

1. In class, students need to have a piece of paper and a pencil/pen. They will be instructed to listen to the word the teacher calls out and write the first things that come into their head. These do not have to be complete sentences, but the students must write until the teacher calls time (2 minutes). At the end of the two minutes, the teacher will call out a second word. Students will repeat the process. A total of four words will be called out.

Self, green, employment, home

-the purpose is to get students minds free and get them thinking abstractly before introducing the idea of “home”

2. Students will read over their responses to the home prompt briefly.

Introduce the Memoir genre

-provide students with handouts

-read through handouts with students

-class discussion to determine understanding

-discuss responses to Zinsser excerpt and questions

3. Keeping their own responses as well as the memoir requirements, descriptions and examples in mind, students will listen to Michael’s memoir read aloud.

4. Ask students if they have any responses.

5. Allow 5-10 minutes for students to revisit their ideas of home, jotting down ideas they didn’t previously think of or adding information to an idea they already listed.

Introduce Memoir Mentor Text

-author bio

-purpose of text

-introduce excerpt

-10 minutes of teacher led, whole class reading

-students will finish reading excerpt for homework

### **Day 2:**

1. Class discussion of Memoir Mentor Text excerpt (helping students fill in gaps in comprehension)

2. Lead a discussion of author’s use of “Home”

3. Ask students to share connections between author's use of home and their home examples in their pre-writing from the previous day.
4. Complete the Memory Jog pre-writing assignment.
  - Draw a plan of one floor, showing rooms, doors, windows, pieces of furniture, etc. Ask someone (a friend, a family member, anyone) to mark an "X" in one of the rooms. Write a description of that room, paying attention to all five senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste). Then write a brief story of something that happened in that room. If this is an actual room, tell a story of something that happened to you in that room.
5. Describe your favorite place whether it be a home, a relative's house, a vacation spot, etc. and tell why it was meaningful. Use all your senses in your description.
  - What did it look like?
  - What were some significant scents?
  - What sounds do you recall?
  - What did it feel like...what was the weather like?
  - What kind of foods did you eat when you were there?
6. Allow students time to revisit their various pre-writes on home, thinking about the Memoir Mentor text excerpt, and create the idea of home they want to write about.
7. The remainder of the class period will be used to begin first draft of memoir.
8. Students will finish first draft for homework.

### **Day 3**

1. Using writing workshop groups of three, students will workshop one another's stories, providing useful feedback for revision (can use the LSQ model—what readers like, what they suggest, and what they question)
2. Teacher will interact with each group, offering suggestions and keeping groups focused.
3. Allow 10 minutes for students to self-review, reading peer comments and making notes for revision.
4. Students will craft second draft for homework. Second draft will be uploaded to Google Docs or other online collaborative tool. Students will continue conferencing and peer reviewing using the online collaborative tool.
5. Introduce second Memoir Mentor Text (optional—SEE Attachment for Suggested Mentor Texts): Example lesson breakdown provided below.
  - author bio
  - pre-reading discussion on ways we can connect to the natural environment as home
  - read text in class
  - discuss the author's interaction with the environment and they ways he discusses his new environment as home
  - remind students they can use this new idea of home in the revision of their memoir

### **Day 4**

1. Teacher/Student conferences discussing their memoirs. These will be one student at a time for approximately 5-7 minutes each. Teacher will ask open-ended questions, focusing students' thoughts on their story.
2. During conferences, other students will read \_\_\_\_\_???
3. Final drafts of student memoirs crafted for homework. To be turned in the following day.

Publication Ideas:

1. Work with your local newspaper to publish selected student memoirs. This could be done in print text and/or online.
  2. Publish student work on class website.
  3. Burn CDs for students containing the class collection of memoirs.
- \*\*think about utilizing technology for student publication

**Assessment:**

*Student memoirs will be assessed in multiple ways. Teachers will formatively assess student writing in the context of student/teacher conferences. Teachers will also evaluate the progression and growth of the memoir online, as students give, receive, and use peer feedback to revise drafts. Final assessments will be completed by the teacher using a pre-determined rubric created in class, using student suggestions and feedback.*

**Sources for the Lesson:** *This lesson was created using information from several sources.*

- *Dr. Ron Honeycutt, North Carolina State University*
- *Wilhelm and Novak (2011)—theoretical framework for this lesson*
- *Toward a Literature for Wisdom Initiative, Clemson University*
- *Zuwiyya, N. 2000*
- *The Common Core State Standards*
- *The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills*

## **The Assignment**

For this writing assignment, you will be crafting a memoir. See below for definitions and characteristics of the memoir genre. As our main focus of this unit is the idea of “home” in its varied forms, this assignment will provide you with an opportunity to explore these concepts through creative non-fiction.

In no more than 1000 words, write a memoir using your own experiences and memories to flesh out your understandings and viewpoints on the idea of “home.” Remember that you have already written an extended definition of what home building means to you. Feel free to utilize the ideas you brainstormed for that assignment to get you started here. The following guidelines, objectives, and rubric will help you to successfully complete this assignment, meet your course standards, and prepare you for future creative non-fiction writing. More importantly, it will help you to use the writing process as a reflective tool in order to more fully understand yourself and your experiences more fully.

### ***Definition of Memoir***

A **memoir** is a piece of autobiographical writing, usually shorter in nature than a comprehensive autobiography. The memoir, especially as it is being used in publishing today, often tries to capture certain highlights or meaningful moments in one's past, often including a contemplation of the meaning of that event at the time of the writing of the memoir. The memoir may be more emotional and concerned with capturing particular scenes, or a series of events, rather than documenting every fact of a person's life (Zuwiyya, N. 2000). For example, Homer Hickam, Jr. has written several memoirs about his life, including October Sky (formerly Rocket Boys) and The Coalwood Way. Both cover his high school days in Coalwood, West Virginia. They are full-length books, but the scope of time is brief compared to Hickam's entire life and all the events of his life.

### ***Characteristics of the Memoir Form***

- Focus on a brief period of time or series of related events
- Narrative structure, including many of the usual elements of storytelling such as setting, plot development, imagery, conflict, characterization, foreshadowing and flashback, and irony and symbolism
- The writer's contemplation of the meaning of these events in retrospect
- A fictional quality even though the story is true
- Higher emotional level
- More personal reconstruction of the events and their impact
- Therapeutic experience for the memoirist, especially when the memoir is of the crisis or survival type of memoir

### ***Writing the home memoir***

To write a memoir on home, begin by brainstorming on paper all the ways you define the term “home” and all the ways you can apply these definitions to your life. In

essence, what memories come to mind when you think of “home”? You can consider memories that are either very important to you in a positive way, or very important to you in a negative way. Feel free to talk to other members of your family to get ideas, help you remember events from your childhood, and to help you fill in any details that you may have forgotten.

Select the event, or series of related events, that you feel fully paint a vivid picture of your idea of “home.” It may help to use events that seem the most interesting to you right now. Being interested in what you write about is a key component of successful writing. Spend a little time brainstorming again, this time in more detail, trying to recall names, places, descriptions, voices, conversations, things, and all the other details that will help you turn this into an interesting memoir and will help you share with others your connections to the concept of “home.”

Spend enough time on this note taking stage until you feel you’ve got it all down on paper. Then begin to write. You will be surprised to see that even more details begin to appear once you start to write. For your first draft, write quickly to get all your ideas down from beginning to end. Don’t worry about editing. Before you revise, share your first draft with a friend or family member. Consider their response, but go with what feels right. Rewrite, and then start editing as needed. You will work with a partner to workshop your text. Each of you will upload your initial draft to Google Docs and share the document with your partner. From there, you will read, comment, and discuss where your writing is and how you can take it to the next draft. Remember to focus on coherence, organization, content, conventions, etc., the same concepts we have focused on in our previous in-class workshops.

Each of you will also sign up for two conferences with me, where we will discuss your drafting and revisions and so I can offer you additional feedback. Remember, as always, our feedback and suggestions are just that; they are meant to help you focus and hone your writing. Our ultimate goal is to help one another produce the best possible draft of their memoir piece.

Good memoirs are about everyday things, but they are interesting, sometimes just as interesting to read as a good novel. But remember, a memoir is supposed to be true, so be careful not to exaggerate or embellish the truth beyond a reasonable limit.

All final student drafts will be published on the class website, where you will have the opportunity to expand your audience and find out what others think about your story. Interested students will also have the opportunity to publish their finished memoirs in the local newspaper as part of a community awareness project.

## ***Bibliography of Memoirs***

***This list is not meant to be comprehensive, but is instead meant to get you started thinking about possible mentor texts to use with students during the memoir assignment.***

Accidental Journey: A Cambridge Internee's Memoir of World War II by Maryk Lynton

All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs by Elie Wiesel

Almost a Woman by Esmeralda Santiago

An American Childhood by Annie Dillard

Angela's Ashes: A Memoir by Frank McCourt

Angeles Crest: A Memoir by Michael Modzelewski

Appel is Forever: A Child's Memoir by Suzanne Mehler Whiteley

Black Dog of Fate by Peter Balakian

Black Ice by Lorene Cary

Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self by Rebecca Walker

The Blood Runs Like a River Through My Dreams by Nasdijj

A Boy Called H by Kappa Senoh (Japan from a boy's eyes, WWII)

The Circle of Hanh: A Memoir by Bruce Weigl

Clear Springs: A Family Story by Bobbie Ann Mason

Colored People: A Memoir by Louis Gates

Days of Grace: a Memoir by Arthur Ashe

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly by Jean-Dinubuqye Bauby (France)

Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight by Alexandra Fuller (Rhodesia)

Ecology of a Cracker Childhood by Janisse Ray (rural Georgia)

The Endless Steppe by Esther Hautzig (Siberia, 1941)

Farewell to Manzanar by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James Houston

Finding Fish by Antwone Quenton Fisher

The Girl with the White Flag by Tomiko Higa

Honkey by Dalton Conley

I Dreamed of Africa by Kuki Gallmann (Kenya, 1960s)

If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box Me Up and Ship Me Home by Tim O'Brien (Vietnam)

Life on the Mississippi by Mark Twain

Manhattan Memoir by Mary Cantwell

My Sense of Silence by Lennard J. Davis (growing up with deaf parents)

On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft by Stephen King (includes the big accident)

Out of Africa by Isak Dinesen (Kenya, 1930s and 1940s)

Out of Place by Edward Said (Palestine)

Red Scarf Girl by Ji Li Jiang (1966, Cultural Revolution, China)

The Road from Coorain by Jill Ker Conway (Australia)

Seven Years in Tibet by Heinrich Harrer (source of the 1996 movie)

Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis by Robert F. Kennedy

This Boy's Life by Tobias Wolff

This Tiger's Tale by Fran Angeline (Binghamton, NY)

The Unwanted by Kien Nguyen (Vietnam)

Up from Slavery by Booker T. Washington

West with the Night by Beryl Markham (Kenya)

When I Was Puerto Rican by Esmeralda Santiago

Zoya's Story by Zoya