## Reflection on Memoir Sequence Development

Elizabeth Barnett

August 16, 2017

This Memoir sequence will be Sequence 2 in my fall English classes. Memoir was perhaps the hands-down favorite genre of my 110 students in the fall of last year. I felt that it worked very well as a follow-on genre to explore after students profiled their discourse communities because it continues and delves deeper into the type of personal, expressive writing begun in Sequence 1 of the English 110 curriculum. As with discourse communities, it allows reluctant writers to write about something they care about, have a deep personal connection to, and about which they are the experts. One of my goals for students in this memoir sequence is to work at understanding the threshold concept of writing being a knowledge-making activity, that they actually create and hone the meaning of the event for themselves in their writing of it. A second goal I have is to tie the memoir to the threshold concept of writing being a profoundly social activity (SLO B) in conveying their lesson, insight, or cautionary tale to others.

In Sequence 1 this fall, my classes will already have read and discussed Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in Chapter 3 of *Writing Today*. We will also already have read the Introduction, “Higher Ground,” in *Just Mercy* and discussed the discourse communities to which Bryan Stevenson belongs. Also in Sequence 1, we will have read Chapter 2, “Stand,” and discussed as a class Stevenson’s experience in his car with the Atlanta police. Here in this Memoir sequence, we revisit Figure 3.2 in *Writing Today*, but we will discuss it from a personal, rather than an audience, perspective. My Stretch students will begin using class journals here as a tool to explore and develop their own Code of Ethics over the course of two semesters, including the ethics and values of their discourse communities they identified in Sequence 1. Other instructors could choose to do likewise in presenting sections of *Just Mercy* in Sequence 1, but they are also free to just start here with this sequence and introduce Figure 3.2 for the first time and begin *Just Mercy* here with Chapter 3, which provides a solid, detailed overview of the McMillian case and the main themes of the book. Additionally, each *Just Mercy* chapter reading in this sequence is centered on a single discussion question that I want my students to write about in class journals, but other instructors might want to use discussion boards for 110/120 classes.

## Schedule for Memoir Sequence, Oct. 16-Nov. 17

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| *Date* | *In class topic* | *Reading Due* | *Assignment Due* |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| M  10/16 | Overview of Sequence 2: Memoir, SWAs, MWA  Genre Analysis: Memoir  **SLO A Rhetorical Situation & Genre, analyze and compose in various genres**  Six-Word Memoir video: <http://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/> | Chapter 5, “Memoirs” in *Writing Today* | REVEL Quiz on Chapter 5  In class: Free write a six-word memoir of your own.  **SLO D Grammar, improve fluency** |
| W  10/18 | Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Revisited from Chapter 3, *Writing Today*  Introduce SWA 1: Where Are You On the Scale?  **SLO F Reflection, reflect on where you are in developing your personal ethics** | “Can Ethics Be Taught?” (<https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/can-ethics-be-taught/>) | In class: Begin a personal Code of Ethics in your notebook. |
| F  10/20 | Rhetorical Analysis:  Musical Memoirs  Alexis Cara’s “Here”  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrGX4KZ44WI  Adele’s “Hello” http://www.bing.com/search?pc=COSP&ptag=D081016-AEC0016903F&form=CONBDF&conlogo=CT3334468&q=youtube%2Fadele+hello | In class, we will do rhetorical analysis of these memoirs: the audience, purpose, conflict, etc. What’s the genre? What’s the take-away lesson? | In class: Change the audience for Adele’s “Hello.” Write one or two paragraphs on how the meaning changes if you change the audience.  **SLO A Rhetorical Situation and Genre, analyze and compose appropriate to rhetorical situation** |
| M  10/23 | Crafting a Memoir: Dealing with Time | Chapter 3, “Trials and Tribulation,” from *Just Mercy* | Discussion Questions:  How does Stevenson deal with timeframes in telling his story in this chapter?  In class: free write in your Code of Ethics |
| W  10/25 | Peer review SWA 1: Where Are You on the Scale?  **SLO B**  **Writing As A Social Act,**  **SLO C Writing As A Process, editing and revising** |  | Bring a hardcopy draft of your SWA 1 to class. |
| F  10/27 | Making Meaning: SWA 2.2 Evocative Objects  Assigning meaning to objects in our memories  Crafting a rubric |  | SWA 2.1 due, 9 a.m.  In class: develop rubric together  **SLO A Rhetorical Situation & Genre, rubric as genre**  **SLO B Writing As A Social Act** |
| M  10/30 | Crafting a Memoir: Telling a story within a story, W.E.B. DuBois | Chapter 5, “On the Coming of John,” from *Just Mercy* | Discussion Question: what are the burdens of being “the hope of an entire community?”  In class: free write in your Code of Ethics |
| W  11/1 | A Halloween After-Party  Genre Analysis: The Ghost Story  **SLO A Rhetorical Situation & Genre, analyze genres** |  | In class Flash Fiction: The Ghost Story group activity  **SLO B Writing As A Social Act** |
| F  11/3 | Crafting a Memoir: Including Ian’s Poem and Letter  A Student Memoir Example: Leandra Sucet’s memoir in *Altitudes* | Chapter 8, “All God’s Children,” from *Just Mercy* | Discussion Question:  What do you think about incarcerating children?  In class: Close reading of Sucet’s student memoir |
| M  11/6 | Peer review of SWA 2.2  **SLO B**  **Writing As A Social Act,**  **SLO C Writing As A Process, editing and revising** |  | Bring hardcopies of SWA 2. |
| W  11/8 | Reflection on SWA 2.2: Why did you choose what you did, why did you write the way you wrote?  **SLO F Reflection, reflect on your rhetorical choices as a writer** |  | SWA 2.2 due, 9 a.m.  In class: free write a 1-page reflection |
| F  11/10 | Introduce MWA 2: So Unfair Memoir  A Student Memoir: Damian Martinez’ in *Altitudes* |  | In class: Brainstorm, Storyboard, or Outline your MWA  **SLO C Writing As A Process, Using multiple approaches for planning, researching, prewriting, and composing**  In class: close reading of Martinez’ memoir |
| M  11/13 | Classy Tropes & Transitions | In *Writing Today*: Chapter 17, “Choosing A Style”  PDF Handout on  Linking Words | In class:  Standard Transitional Devices Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gku-vSf9Rk> |
| W  11/15 | Peer Review of MWA 2  **SLO B**  **Writing As A Social Act,**  **SLO C Writing As A Process, editing and revising** |  | Bring a draft hardcopy of your MWA 2. |
| F  11/17 |  |  | MWA 2 Memoir due, 9 a.m. |

**Daily Activities**

10/16 Overview of SWAs and MWA for the sequence. Close reading of Chapter 5, Memoirs: What features make a “Memoir” different from writing about a “memory”? Watch short video on Six-Word Memoirs and students will write their own. Share a few with whole class.

10/18 Review graphic of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. In Chapter 3, the graphic is used to talk about profiling readers. Here, though, we will use it to examine our own motion and movement up and down the pyramid. We will do a close reading in class of the online article, “Can Ethics Be Taught?” What are ethics? Are they the same as morals and values? Where have students encountered them before, if at all? How are they developed? Students will begin using their journals today to work on developing their own personal Code of Ethics. Returning to SWA 1.2 from their discourse communities, are there ethics embedded in the values of their discourse communities? Students can start from those, as we progress through other sequences, we will return to these Codes.

10/20 In class, we’ll watch a couple of music videos and do a rhetorical analysis on both. Now, if we change an element of the rhetorical situation---internal audience---in “Hello” what happens to genre, purpose? For example, what if she’s singing to her alcoholic dad? What if she’s singing to her grown daughter? How does the genre then change? It’s not a love song to a lover anymore. How does the take-away lesson change?

10/23 Chapter 3, “Trials and Tribulation,” of *Just Mercy* is an excellent summary of Walter McMillian’s whole case. Some instructors could choose to start here in the story for this sequence, although my students will have already read the introduction and “Stand” as part of Sequence 1. In reading this chapter, I will also ask students to note at least three things in the chapter that made them feel something: surprise, anger, etc., as well as noting the ways Stevenson moves through timeframes in this part of his story. We will discuss how he deals with time and brings in quotes. Is Stevenson using immersed or recollected narrative or both in different places? I hope to have enough time to allow students to free write around this discussion.

10/25 Peer review.

10/27 We will talk about SWA 2.2 and go over prompt. I plan to tie the discussion into the threshold concept of writing making knowledge and meaning. I mean, a ring is just a ring. Nothing more, until we think about and describe it as a symbol of love between two people that transcends time and space. And then we craft a story about it in our minds to tell others how it came to be in our possession, with all the details of who and how and what it all meant. We will develop the rubric together as a class. Can we think of rubrics as a genre? What are the features appropriate to this assignment?

10/30 Chapter 5, “On the Coming of John,” from *Just Mercy*. I thought this chapter might possibly resonate with 110 and 111 students who are first-generation college students. I’d like to center a class discussion on the pros and cons of being “the hope,” as well as talk about the structure of this chapter in Stevenson’s use of DuBois’ story. I hope it might even spark some interest in some students to read DuBois for themselves.

11/1 Last year, Halloween fell on a teaching day for me. I wanted to do something light and fun, so I came up with a flash fiction writing activity around ghost stories. My students loved it, and for those of you who teach T-Th this year, you may use the activity plan as it is included following the SWA and MWA prompts. For those of us on MWF schedules, this day is really the beginning of the Mexican tradition of Día de Muertos, which is actually a two-day remembrance of loved ones who have died. November 1 is the day set aside for the remembrance of children who have died and November 2 is for honoring ancestors who died as adults. Instructors on a MWF schedule, such as I am, may want to point out this distinction from the American celebration of Halloween, which is centered around ghosts, goblins, and things that go bump in the night. To highlight this distinction and properly place the activity as a genre study of the Ghost Story, I have labeled this lesson, on the day following Halloween, as the Halloween “After-Party.”

11/3 Chapter 8, “All God’s Children,” from *Just Mercy*. In this discussion, we will look back at the recurring theme Stevenson first identifies in the Introduction, that we are all more than the worst thing we’ve ever done. How does that inform our decisions about incarcerating teens, or anyone? Structurally, I want students to explore why Stevenson chose to open the chapter with Ian’s poem and close it with his letter. Are the photos Evocative Objects (SWA 2.2) for Ian? Also, I will point students to Leandra Sucet’s memoir in *Altitudes*, as an example of student memoir. Her memoir about her father’s detainment as an illegal immigrant and its effects on her family fit well with the discussions we will have had as a class so far.

11/5 Peer review.

11/8 Reflection. Here we will talk some more about reflection. This time, the discussion will be specifically focused on the rhetorical choices students made in choose their objects and deciding whether to do a diary or an ode. Here, for those that did an ode, they have the chance to explain some of the lexicon and choices that may not be explicit in their poems.

11/10 Introduce and go over prompt for MWA. We will revisit some the Memoir genre conventions we discussed at the beginning of the sequence on Oct. 16., maybe pull up Chapter 5 again on REVEL. As a free write, students can either brainstorm ideas for the MWA, or if they already have an experience in mind, they can draw out a storyboard or write a detailed outline for themselves in class. As another example of student memoirs, I will point students to Damian Martinez’ memoir about his grandfather in *Altitudes*.

11/13 We will go over some of the literary devices detailed in Chapter 17. We will watch a video on transitions. Students should note the three transition devices the video presents: standard transition words, word links, and idea links. The PDF handout is available at <http://www.smart-words.org/linking-words/linking-words.pdf>

An activity plan for the Transitions and Tropes is below, following the SWA and MWA prompts.

11/15 Peer review for MWA.

11/17. Final Memoir MWA due. End of sequence.

**Short Writing Assignment 2.1: This I Believe**

**Draft Due:** Wednesday, Oct. 25, at class time.

**Final Due:** Friday, Oct. 27, on Learn at 9 a.m.

**Description:** For this assignment, you will write a 250- to 300-word essay highlighting some of the things you strongly believe in that shape your identity. It will be a short reflection piece after reading and discussing the version of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs in Chapter 3 of *Writing Today* and the online article “Can Ethics Be Taught?” (<https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/can-ethics-be-taught/>).

**Rhetorical Situation and Purpose:** With this assignment and perhaps returning over the course of the next semester, we will be discussing ethics, particularly in light of readings from the 2017-18 Lobo Read, *Just Mercy*. Some of the people Stevenson’s profiles in his book, *Just Mercy*, have struggled to secure even their most basic survival needs. In this piece, you do not have to share mine or anyone else’s ethics, but my expectation is that you will develop your own as we read and learn more about the history and study of ethics and how others put them into action in the world. You will not be graded on what your stance *is*, rather you will be graded on how well you can *articulate* your stance and the reasons for it. Your audience for this assignment is your fellow classmates, so they may get to know some of the things that matter most to you.

**Genre**: Exploratory Essay on “This I Believe” or mini-Manifesto

Within your own experiences and memories, there is already a wealth of ethical development. Using the values you identified in your discourse community and elsewhere, explain some of the things you believe in strongly for yourself and others and where you feel you are in your ethical development in an essay narrative format. Some people call this type of paper a manifesto or an essay on “This I Believe.” You could use this phrase, “This I Believe,” as a starting point for what you want to say. You can use this assignment to speak about how you act or you think others should act on a college campus, in your discourse community, in a work environment, in a political sense or in the world in general.

**Rubric:** I will determine your grade using this rubric. 50 points possible.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Content: author explores at least 4 to 5 beliefs she or he strongly adheres to regarding what the author and/or others should strive to do in the world or be in the world. For example, is it important to you to always tell the truth? Or is better to be kind? Should people always be allowed to go their own way? Or is it better to follow the rules? The author attempts to make clear to the reader connections between these beliefs and identity. | 35 pts |
| Organization: author guides the reader through a progression of ideas. Each paragraph makes a distinct point and includes relevant supporting details and an example. | 15 pts |
| Extra Credit Mechanics: author has made a credible attempt at proofreading for misspellings or usage that would stop a reader and would hurt the author’s ethos. | 5 pts |

**Small Writing Assignment 2.2: Evocative Objects**

**Draft Due:** Monday, Nov. 6, at class time.

**Final Due:** Wednesday, Nov. 8, on Learn at 9 a.m.

**Description:** Think about the objects you own that you value and tools you have used in your life. Pick an object that tugs at you, catches your interest. Collect some details about the object. Describe it. Where did it come from? How did you learn to use it? What person do you associate with it? What events? Can you remember something that happened in which it played a featured role? How has your use or appreciation of it changed and evolved over time?

**Rhetorical Situation and Purpose:** We all have physical things we’ve formed attachments to and carefully wrapped in memories. The MWA for this sequence is a memoir that focuses on an injustice you’ve experienced. This assignment prepares you for the MWA by asking you to look at physical objects in new and different ways, and to reflect on how we ascribe meaning to physical things (Visual Rhetoric). Although Stevenson doesn’t detail them all deeply in *Just Mercy*, think about all the things---expensive work tools, his souped up vehicle, his home---that Walter had worked so hard to obtain that were stripped away from him during his time in prison. Later, we will read the cases of two other prisoners, for whom a simple photograph and a chocolate shake respectively, hold so much meaning.

**Genre:** You have a choice with this assignment. You can write a one-page Diary or Journal Entry about your object, OR you may write about your object in an Ode poetic format (rhyming or non-rhyming). If you choose the Ode format, you must write at least one page, about 30-40 lines. Use this link for a sample Ode by the Chilean poet and Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda:

http://genius.com/Pablo-neruda-ode-to-my-socks-annotated

**Rubric:**

We will develop the grading rubric for this assignment in class.

**Major Writing Assignment 2: So Unfair Memoir**

**Draft Due:** Wednesday, Nov. 15, at class time.

**Final Due:** Friday, Nov. 17, on Learn at 9 a.m.

**Description:** This major writing assignment will be a memoir on a moment when you experienced an injustice or something directed toward you personally, or you personally witnessed involving someone else, that was completely “unfair” in your eyes. It could be something that happened at work, at home, or at school, between you and a family member or a friend or an authority figure. It could be something that a friend was involved in, or just someone you didn’t know but the timing, or Kairos (the Greek word for the perfect or opportune moment), put you into the situation as a witness. What factors complicated the situation? Rumors? Beliefs? Assumptions? Facts or no facts? Who got to decide what was fair or right in the situation? What was the final outcome? What did you learn from the experience? What do you want other people to understand from this experience?

**Rhetorical Situation and Purpose:** Think about our readings so far in *Just Mercy*. Why did Stevenson write this memoir? Why did he choose to include his own experience early on involving the Atlanta police? Write for your fellow students in this class to share a lesson, an insight, a point for ruminating on, or a cautionary tale.

**Genre**: In a narrative essay format for Memoir, write between 750 and 1000 words, double spaced, 12-point Times Roman font.

**Rubric:** I will determine your grade using this rubric. 100 points possible.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Features | Grades |  |  |
| Title | 5 4  Entices, sets a tone, grabs the reader’s interest, forecasts the subject. | 3 2  A credible attempt at a title that forecasts the memoir subject | >2  No title or uses “MWA 2” |
| Content and Lesson or Shift | 65 64 63 62 61 60  Author makes an interesting story with a clear complication/conflict of injustice or unfair event. Author builds a compelling story using first-person narrative. Memoir ends with an explicit lesson learned or a shift in your perspective on the world, or leaves the reader to ruminate on a feeling. | 59 58 57 56 55  Lesson or shift or feeling is clearly there, but organizational problems give reader trouble following the course of events. | >55  Paper details more of a simple memory or readers have a hard time identifying the conflict. Lacks a clear lesson or shift that others could benefit from learning or pondering. |
| Tropes & Transitions | 30 29 28 27 26 25  Author has used at least two or more tropes discussed in class somewhere in the memoir. Transition words are used correctly to smooth the flow from one paragraph to the next. At least two word links and two idea links are attempted. | 24 23 22 21 20  At least one trope is obvious. Credible attempt at trying out transition words, and at least one word link and one idea link. | >20  Readers can’t find any tropes or transition words. No attempt is made to try out word links or idea links. |
| Extra Credit Mechanics | 5 points  Paper is free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors that would hurt the author’s ethos with readers. |  |  |

**Activity Plan for Halloween After-Party: Genre Analysis and The Ghost Story**

By Elizabeth Barnett

Developed for English 110, 2016

Halloween in 2017 does not fall on a teaching day for me, but I wanted to use this activity again because it was so successful last year with my students. If you are teaching on Halloween, then you can proceed with the lesson as is. For me, on this day, together as a class, we will briefly discuss the differences between the American holiday of Halloween and the Mexican holiday of Día de Muertos. Following that, we will enact a flash version of the genre of Ghost Story.

1. Together as a class, list of all the features students can think of that make a ghost story a ghost story. 10 minutes.
2. Read aloud one or both flash stories from Figment.com. Each one is only about a 1- to 2-minute read (about 200 words).

The Wait: <http://figment.com/books/656811-The-Wait>

Careful, It’s Hot: <http://figment.com/books/656485-Careful-It-s-Hot>

3. Discuss each: What makes them ghost stories? Suspense? A character who is dead? What emotions does the writer play on? Surprise? Love? Attraction? How? What features that we discussed earlier are present in each? What things does the reader know that the main character doesn’t really understand? How is this achieved? (10 minutes)

4. Break the class into groups to free write their own ghost story. You can get as cliché as you want, for example, requiring them to begin stories with “It was a dark and stormy night” or having them write their own spin on La Llorona, or it has to be set on campus, etc. (10 minutes)

5. Each group reads its story aloud to the class, we vote on the best Ghost Story of El Día with the winners getting some leftover Halloween candy (OK, everybody gets leftover Halloween candy).

My Experience: This was an amazingly successful activity for first-year composition students. My classes had a lot of fun with this group activity and wrote some very creative ghost stories. This free-write genre exploration is fun and easy to do as most students, even those who aren’t prolific readers, know the conventions of this genre. The discussion and process primarily address SLO A Rhetorical Situation and Genre but can also test students a bit with SLO D Grammar, improving fluency in the flash aspect of the activity. The point is to think, organize, and write a story fast.

**Activity Plan for Classy Transitions & Tropes**

By Elizabeth Barnett

Developed for English 120, 2016

**Transitions:** A little less than half the class time (in a 50-minute class), about 15-20 minutes, focuses on Transitions, with students watching the video, Standard Transitional Devices, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gku-vSf9Rk>. The Student Viewing Task for this video is to note and remember the three devices: (1) standard transition words (the PDF handout), (2) the word link, and (3) the idea link. The PDF handout can be downloaded at

<http://www.smart-words.org/linking-words/linking-words.pdf>

**Tropes:** Allow more time for the focus on Tropes, maybe about 30-35 minutes.

Prep: I’ve used the following tropes cut up and pasted on index cards. Set up about four trope stations for a 50-minute class, more for a 75-minute class.

**Synecdoche:** A trope in which a part stands for the whole.

Example: "Tom just bought a fancy new set of wheels."

**Oxymoron:** A trope that connects two contradictory terms.

Example: “Bill is a cheerful pessimist.”

**Metaphor:** A trope in which a word or phrase is transferred

from its literal meaning to stand for something else.

Unlike a simile, in which something is said to be "like"

something else, a metaphor says something ***is*** something else.

Example: "Debt is a bottomless sea."

**Irony:** A trope in which a word or phrase is used

to mean the opposite of its literal meaning.

Example: "I just love scrubbing the floor."

**Hyperbole:** A trope composed of exaggerated words or ideals

used for emphasis and not to be taken literally.

Example: "I've told you a million times not to call me a liar!"

**Personification:** A trope in which human qualities or abilities

are assigned to abstractions or inanimate objects.

Example: “Integrity thumbs its nose at pomposity.”

**Simile:** A trope in which one states a comparison

between two things that are not alike but have similarities.

Unlike metaphors, similes use "like" or "as."

Example: "Her eyes are as blue as a robin's egg."

1. Briefly go over Section 17.3 in Chapter 17 of *Writing Today*. (5 minutes)
2. Place a card with an example trope on four tables with a different colored pen at each station for each trope.
3. Divide the class into four groups (depending on time and how many tropes you want to do).
4. Each group will have about 6-7 minutes (in a 50-minute class) at each station to create their own example of the trope. A scribe for each group will write down their example.
5. If time, have groups present their best trope to the class.

My Experience: Smooth transitions were difficult for my 120 students. I felt like it was enough to just expose them to the concept of linking words/ideas, or what others call the “given-new” formula, so they could begin to look for the construct in other readings they encounter in college. The tropes part I did as a separate class period and had students move through the stations on their own individually. It was not as engaging as I thought it would be, so this time around, I will try them together and with students working in groups. They’ll have less time and have to work together faster. I hope it will be more fun and engaging this way.