

Name: _____

Date: _____

*“By being the curator of our images, we care for our souls.”
--Thomas Moore*

Say it in six words: Six-word memoir unit

This week, we will be writing and illustrating our own six-word memoirs.

The first question on your mind is probably, “What is a memoir?”

A memoir is an account of one's life and experiences. Rather than presenting an overview of one's whole life, the memoir focuses on one slim section of one's life and experiences. The story can be told chronologically, but events do not need to be recounted in the order in which they have occurred.

An autobiography, unlike a memoir, is defined as a written work about someone's own life, which gives an overview of the author's entire life. Therefore, autobiographies are meant to cover all aspects of someone's life.

In memoir, “The writer of a memoir takes us back to a corner of his or her life that was unusually vivid or intense.... By narrowing the lens, the writer achieves a focus that isn't possible in autobiography; memoir is a window into a life.”

--William Zinsser

“Memoir involves the whittling away of a whole lot of stuff that you have lived and a focusing on one slim section, full of power, that demands to be told.”

-- Lisa Dale Norton

A memoir can be any length. It should be honest and reflect your individual voice.

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In 2008, a book entitled *Not Quite What I Was Planning: Six Word Memoirs by Writers Famous & Obscure* (edited by Smith Magazine) was published. The book is a compilation of hundreds of 6-word memoirs that were submitted to the book's publisher. *Not Quite What I Was Planning* remained on *The New York Times* best seller list for six weeks. This book demonstrates that:

- Everyone has a story to tell!
- It doesn't take a lot of words to communicate emotion and ideas.

In the following pages, you'll find examples of some six-word memoirs.

## **Examples of Six-Word Memoirs**

Awkward girl takes chances. Fun ensues.

-- Charlotte Riley

I auditioned. I got the part.

-- Faith Hoffman

Never lived up to my potential.

--Leslie Sterling

Carbohydrates call my name every day.

--Mary Petersdorf

Anything possible—but I was tired.

--Cheryl Family

Girlfriend is pregnant, my husband said.

--Shonna MacDonald

I am awfully bored at work.

-- Chris Ponchak

Learned reading, writing, forgot arithmetic.

--Elizabeth Rose Gruner

A sundress will solve life's woes.

--Kristen Grimm

I recognize red flags faster, now.

--Barbara Burri

**Never should have bought that ring.**

**--Pete Bellows**

Stranded by ten-thousand mile crush.

--Will Cockrell

*College was fun. Damn student loans.*

*--Randy Boland*

Time heals all wounds? Not quite.

--Jonathan Miles

Taking a lifetime to grow up.

--Mirona Iliescu

Bad brakes discovered at high speed.

-Paul Schultz

Danced in Fields of Infinite Possibilities.

--Deepak Chopra

I am trying, in every regard.

--Lionel Shriver

Happiest when ignoring huge financial debt.

--Ayanna Bryan

I threw away my teddy bear.

--Margot Loren

My baby's name was Sydney Jane.

--Margot Bertoni

All night phone calls complete me.

--Harry Manning

*Tragic childhood can lead to wisdom.*

--*Kristin Ahlemieir-Olfe*

Found true love. Married someone else.

--Bjorn Stromberg

On her birthday, my life began.

--Lisa Parrack

Afraid of becoming like my mother.

--Gail Reilly

I'm enjoying  
even this  
downward  
dance.

--Columm McCann

*One tooth. One cavity. Life's cruel.*  
--John Bettencourt

Couldn't cope so I wrote songs.  
--Aimee Mann

With three cats, I'm never unloved.  
--Cynthia MacDonald

*I write because I can't sleep.*  
--Ben Mezrich

Mistook streetlight for the moon. Climbed.  
--Zack Wentz

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If you enjoyed reading these short memoirs, you can visit:
<http://www.sixwordmemoir.com>

Through the website, you can also submit your own six-word memoirs,
which you may even see published on the website!

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Six-Word Memoir: Analysis Questions

Now that you read some six-word memoirs, complete this worksheet.

Select two of the six-word memoirs we reviewed as a class. Copy them down in the boxes below.

Memoir #1:

Memoir #2:

Use the space below to answer the following questions:

- What do you think is the meaning/message behind this short memoir?
- What do you think prompted the writer to create this memoir?

Memoir #1:

Memoir #2:

Name: _____

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Guidelines for Writing your own Six-Word Memoir

For the next class: You will be writing between **ten and fifteen** six-word memoirs. Each memoir must:

- Contain exactly **6 words**.
- Have correct or appropriate **spelling, grammar, capitalization** and **punctuation**.

Additionally, complete the **brainstorming sketch sheet** for three memoirs you may want to illustrate. This sheet does not need to be anywhere near perfect or complete. It is just meant to get you thinking about how you might illustrate some of your six-word memoirs.

For the final project: **Three of the ten memoirs you hand in for a test grade must be accompanied by illustrations.**

Your writing should:

- **BE CONCISE.** Concise writing expresses a lot in a few words. If you write concisely, you use few words to clearly convey your idea.
- **CONVEY TONE.** The reader should know your attitude toward the subject. Your writing style can be informal or contain slang. The goal of this assignment is to help your reader get to know you!

Your writing may:

- utilize literary terms
- describe your personality/values
- describe your hobbies
- refer to an experience or action
- include strong verbs, adjectives, or specific nouns

This project **does not** need to be typed, but it must be neat and legible.

Use the space below to brainstorm ideas for your six-word memoirs. You may refer to any previous assignments, freewriting, or writing exercises for ideas!

Ideas For My Six-Word Memoir

Part II. On this brainstorming sketch sheet, sketch out three six-word memoirs you may want to illustrate for your final project.



