

Stanford | Continuing Studies

Course Title: Memoir III: Envisioning an Ending

Course Code: OWC 205 A

Instructor Name: Julia Scheeres

Class Schedule and Recording

Meeting days and times: Fridays, 12:00 to 1:15pm PT

Meeting location: On Zoom

Class sessions will be recorded. We will begin each Zoom session by addressing any questions/ comments that arise from that week's lecture. Starting the second week, we will begin workshopping two students in each session.

Assignments & Coursework

We'll start the workshop in Week Two. Submissions -- of 2,500 - 5,000 words -- are due by Friday midnight of the previous week. If you aren't submitting the opening pages of your memoir, please provide context to orient readers.

There will be a concurrent, student-led writing workshop for folks who've submitted but desire continuous feedback on their revised pages. (I will not read these but will focus instead on the formal workshop.)

Class Topics

Grabbing and keeping your readers' attention

Avoiding lawsuits/ managing reactions of family and others

Truthiness in memoir/ enhancing memory

Crafting vivid scenes and settings

Working toward a satisfying ending

Grade Options and Requirements

- Letter Grade (A,B,C,D,NP)
 - The following elements must be completed for the student to receive an A in this course:
 - Handing in 2000-5,000 words from your memoir for workshop
 - Posting thoughtful and thorough responses to everyone else's workshop submission
 - Participating in at least one discussion post each week

Textbooks/Required Materials

Required:

This Boy's Life by Tobias Wolf, 978-0802136688

The Chronology of Water by Lidia Yuknavitch, 978-0979018831

Other readings will be provided.

Pre-class Assignment

Please submit an overview in Canvas of your project in 300 words or less, written in the third person. This should convey the theme(s), narrative and character arcs and major plot points. It should also reflect the voice -- humorous? somber? poetic? -- that characterizes the book. For examples of how to do this, look at the book jacket of your favorite memoirs.

Tentative Weekly Outline

Week One

Theme as Road Map

Grabbing and keeping the reader's attention

Setting up the story and stakes

Week Two

Truth in Memoir

Gray areas in memoir: emotional truth, representational details and modes of shaping a story

The power of author's notes

Week Three

Conjuring Up the Past

Devices, tricks and exercises to bring the past to life

Week Four

Art + Law

Running with Scissors as cautionary tale

How to minimize your legal risk

Week Five

Scenes: the building blocks of story

Where and how to focus the reader's attention

Week Six

Raising the Stakes

Complicating the story

External/ internal tension

Week Seven

Stay Human

Creating complex, believable, memorable characters

Compassion for others -- and ourselves

Week Eight

Setting/ Place

The places that shape us/ how to reveal them on the page

Week Nine

Writing Toward an Ending

Leaning into the narrative/ character arc

Week Ten

Revision

Best practices in self-editing

How to know when you're "done"

Additional Information

The use of generative AI tools is permitted in this course for brainstorming, researching topics, and checking grammar/spelling. However, it is prohibited for drafting papers, assignment submissions, or discussion board posts. Use of AI tools for prohibited activities may be considered academic dishonesty, and thus a violation of the student Code of Conduct.

It is never permitted to upload your classmates' writing/content to an AI tool without their permission.