

**SYLLABUS**  
**Reminiscence: A Creative Writing Workshop**  
**Lily Iona MacKenzie**  
**<http://lilyionamackenzie.com>**  
**[Lmackenzie@pacbell.net](mailto:Lmackenzie@pacbell.net)**

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

**We've all heard of and read autobiographies. They move in a dutiful line from birth to wherever the end point is. But memoir is much different. It narrows the lens and focuses on a time in our life that was unusually vivid. It could be some period in childhood or adolescence, or a stage that was framed by war or travel or public service or some other special circumstance.**

**In other words, memoir comprises a slice of our life and helps us to make sense of who we are, who we once were, and what values and heritage shaped us. By creating a narrative about an earlier period in our lives, we'll arrive at a truth that is ours alone, not quite like that of anyone else who was present at the same events.**

**In this workshop, you'll be focusing on periods that have particular significance for you and that may end up being reflective in some ways of you as a person. As William Zinsser says in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, "Memoir is how we try to make sense of who we are, who we once were, and what values and heritage shaped us." Memoir uses a narrow lens from which to visit the past—for example, childhood, adolescence, travel, public service, or some other special circumstance.**

**Jill Ker Conway, author of *When Memory Speaks*, claims that “We travel through life guided by an inner life plot—part the creation of family, part the internalization of broader social norms, part the function of our imaginations and our own capacity for insight into ourselves.... Yet we are all unique, and so are our stories. We should pay close attention to our stories” (177).**

**Writing memoir is like having a personal penny that you’ve hidden for someone else to discover. It also will help you to see more clearly your past and present selves. Whenever we engage ourselves at a deeper level and reconstruct some aspect of our former selves, we are increasing our self-understanding.**

**I’m hoping you’ll enrich each other by your responses to the readings and to the memoir moments you share. This workshop is designed for those who don’t necessarily view themselves as writers but who wish to use that medium for self-exploration. As long as you can write a clear sentence and paragraph, you should have the skills necessary to participate in this class.**

**Since I’ll be responding to the pieces you submit via email, basic email and Internet skills are required. It also is helpful if you can turn in typed assignments.**

**Three other things you need for this class:**

- 1. You have to write.**
- 2. You have to read.**
- 3. You have to get enlightened feedback.**

**Each week I'll bring in a different technique to discuss as well as a sample reading of the technique in action.**

**9/10/18  
SESSION 1**

## **Introduction & Class Overview**

**Due before our next workshop on 9/17/18:**

**Please introduce yourself by responding to the following questions in an email to me at your earliest convenience. Send your answers in the body of the email. You needn't go into extensive detail.**

- **How would you describe your stage in life?**
- **Why are you taking this class?**
- **Have you done much writing?**
- **What are you hoping to take away from this workshop?**
- **Briefly describe your email/computer skills?**

**When I receive your bios, I'll then forward them to other class members so you can begin to get to know everyone.**

**In-class discussion: narrative elements**

**In-class writing**

## **9/17/18, SESSION 2**

**Due before our next workshop on 9/17/18:**

**Please introduce yourself by responding to the following questions in an email to me at your earliest convenience. Send your answers in the body of the email. You needn't go into extensive detail.**

- **How would you describe your stage in life?**
- **Why are you taking this class?**
- **Have you done much writing?**
- **What are you hoping to take away from this workshop?**
- **Briefly describe your email/computer skills?**

**When I receive your bios, I'll then forward them to other class members so you can begin to get to know everyone.**

### **DUE ON 9/17/18:**

- **Sensory detail (description) assignment for Session 2. (I described this assignment in the 9/10/18 PowerPoint PDF that I sent to you in an email.)**
- **Bring 5 typed copies of your sample writing to share with a small group. Limit its length to 500 words of double-spaced text.**

### **IN-CLASS:**

- **Discussion of narrative elements & and more work with sensory detail**

- Reading and discussion of sample reading
- Small group critique

***9/24/18, SESSION 3***

**DUE ON 9/24/18: Sensory detail assignment described in the 9/17/18 PowerPoint that I sent to you in an email.**

**IN-CLASS on 9/24/18:**

- Discussion of narrative element: plot/story
- Reading and discussion of reading sample
- Small group critique

***10/1/18, SESSION 4***

**DUE FOR 10/1/18:**

- Draft of exercise in plot & form that is described in the 9/24/18 PowerPoint. Bring 5 copies to share with a small group.

**IN-CLASS 10/1/18:**

- Discussion of narrative element: character
- Reading and discussion of reading sample
- Small group critiques

***10/8/18, NO CLASS!***

***10/15/18, SESSION 5***

**DUE FOR 10/15/18:**

- **Draft of exercise on character that was described in 10/1/18 PowerPoint. Bring 5 copies to share with a small group.**

**IN-CLASS 10/15/18:**

- **Discussion of narrative element: place/setting**
- **Reading and discussion of reading sample**
- **Small group critiques**

***10/22/18, SESSION 6***

**DUE FOR 10/22/18**

- **Draft of exercise on place/setting as described in the PowerPoint on 10/15/18. Bring 5 copies of your sample writing on place to share with a small group.**

**IN-CLASS 10/22/18:**

- **Discussion of narrative element: scene & dialogue**
- **Reading and discussion of reading sample**
- **Small group critiques**

**10/29/18, SESSION 7**

**DUE FOR 10/29/18:**

- **Draft of exercise on scene & dialogue as described in the PowerPoint for 10/22/18. Bring 5 copies to share with a small group.**

**IN-CLASS 10/29/18:**

- **Discussion of Revision techniques & Reflection**
- **Reading and discussion of reading sample**
- **Small group critiques**

**11/5/18, SESSION 8**

**DUE FOR 11/5/18: finish reading *This Boys' Life*.**

**IN-CLASS:**

- **Student readings of revised pieces (5 mins each)**
- **Discussion of *This Boys' Life*.**
- **Final writing prompt**