

From Me to We:

Broadening Millennial Minds through Creative Nonfiction

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Four Lessons for Writing Engaging Nonfiction

Lesson 1: Write Your Truth

- **Activity:** Perspective Walk- Take students on a 5-10 minute walk around campus without explaining the purpose. When you return, have students write the story of their walk. Have students share and use the variance in the accounts to demonstrate the difference between relative and ultimate truth.

Lesson 2: Build the Reservoir

- **Activities:** Over a period of time, have students make lists, write to prompts, keep writers' notebooks, and mine social media posts so that they have plenty of ideas to draw from for an engaging personal essay.
- **Example:** Make a T-Chart List, on the left, list five of the most interesting people you've ever met. On the right, list the characteristics which make those people so interesting.

Lesson 3: Put the Reader in Your Shoes

- **Activity:** Write in active scenes. Just like movie scenes, narrative scenes have a beginning and an end, and something happens in between. Use action, dialogue and active verbs to show rather than tell.
- **Example:** Choose an interesting person from your list. Write a brief, active scene which shows that person demonstrating one of his/her interesting characteristics.

Lesson 4: Frame it Right

- **Activity:** Evaluating First-lines- To help students consider the power of first lines, choose an anthology (like the Best American Essays), read some actual opening lines to students and have them rank their interest from 1-5. After they've explained why, read the rest of the opening paragraph and have them give a thumbs up or a thumbs down as to whether their interest increased or decreased.
- And remember Jane Bernstein's suggested advice for an unspoken last line: "And nothing was the same after that." If students can put that at the end of a personal essay, they're done.

Narrative Nonfiction Resources

Creative Writing Journals Featuring Creative Nonfiction

- **Creative Nonfiction Magazine:** True Stories, well told. <https://www.creativenonfiction.org/>
- **The Sun:** Personal. Provocative. Political. Provocative. Ad-free. <http://thesunmagazine.org/>
- **Hippocampus Magazine:** Memorable creative nonfiction. <http://www.hippocampusmagazine.com/>
- **Brevity:** A Journal of Concise Literary Nonfiction. <http://brevitymag.com/>
- **Riverteeth:** A Journal of Nonfiction Narrative. <http://www.riverteethjournal.com/>
- **Fourth Genre:** Explorations in Nonfiction. <http://msupress.org/journals/fg/>
- **1966: A Journal of Creative Nonfiction.** <http://1966journal.org/>

Books on the Genre/Craft

- **You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything in Between** by Lee Gutkind
- **Minds Made for Stories: How We Really Read and Write Informational and Persuasive Texts** by Tom Newkirk
- **To Show and the Tell: The Craft of Literary Nonfiction** by Phillip Lopate
- **Writing for Story: Craft Secrets of Dramatic Nonfiction by a Two-Time Pulitzer Prize Winner** by Jon Franklin
- **Tell it Slant: Creating, Refining, and Publishing Creative Nonfiction** by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola
- **Crafting the Personal Essay: A Guide for Writing and Publishing Creative Nonfiction** by Dinty Moore

Personal Essay Anthologies

- **The Best American Essays** (Published Yearly), Robert Atwan Series Editor
 - Guest Editors have included Ariel Levy, Edwidge Danticat, Cheryl Strayed, John Jeremiah Sullivan, David Brooks, David Foster Wallace, and others.
- **The Impossible Will Take a Little While: A Citizens Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear**, Paul Rogat Loeb (Ed)
 - Contributors include: Diane Ackerman, Sherman Alexie, Maya Angelou, Marian Wright Edelman, Jonathan Kozol, Nelson Mandela, Cornell West, and others.
- **40 Model Essays: A Portable Anthology**, Jane E. Aaron & Ellen Kuhl Repetto (Eds)
- **50 Essays: A Portable Anthology**, Samuel Cohen (Ed).

Standout Narrative Nonfiction Podcasts

- **The Moth Radio Hours:** <http://themoth.org/>
- **This American Life:** <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/>
- **Serial:** <http://serialpodcast.org/>
- **Radiolab:** <http://www.radiolab.org/>
- **Snap Judgment:** <http://snapjudgment.org/>

Student Writing Opportunities

- **Scholastic Art & Writing Awards**, Personal Essay & Memoir Category: <http://www.artandwriting.org/>
- **The Norman Mailer High School Nonfiction Writing Award:** <http://www.ncte.org/awards/nmwa>