**Say It in Six Words: 6-Word Memoir Unit**

**English 2S/E**

Legend has it that author Ernest Hemingway was once challenged to write a story in only six words. He responded with this classic line: **“For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”**

The success of Hemingway’s story lies in the multiple questions and possible meanings between the lines. For example: Why is the narrator selling the shoes? Is the baby grown? Did she die? Did she simply go barefoot or was she never able to walk? Is the narrator the mother, father, a sibling, the former baby? Is the story about the end of childhood or the end of parenthood?

This week, you will be writing and illustrating your own six-word memoirs. So, first we answer the question “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 many 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).

Choose a person in one of the pictures on the next page. Write words and phrases to describe **that person**. What are they like? What are they thinking? Feeling? What do they see?

   

Write a six-word memoir about the person in the picture you described above.

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, and it doesn’t take a lot of words to clearly communicate complex 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

(Technically, this one bends the rules as hyphenated words count as one word!)

*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

# ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

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!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Hour \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# **Six-Word Memoir: Analysis Questions**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 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? Interpret what the author has said—tell the same story using different/more words. * What do you think prompted the writer to create this memoir? In other words, what is the story behind the memoir? What came before? | |
| Memoir #1: | Memoir #2: |

## **Write Your Own Six-Word Memoir**

1. Use the space below to **brainstorm** ideas for your six-word memoirs. Make lists; draw; write words that describe you, your experiences, your tastes, your memories, your goals.

**Ideas for My Six-Word Memoirs**

|  |
| --- |
|  |

1. On a separate sheet of lined paper, **write** **ten (10) six-word memoirs**. Each memoir must:
   * + - Contain exactly **6 words**.
       - Have correct or appropriate **spelling, grammar, capitalization** and **punctuation**.
       - Please number them on the page.

Your writing should:

* **BE CONCISE.** Concise writing expresses a lot in a few words.
* **CONVEY TONE.** The reader should understand your attitude toward the subject.Your writing style can be informal or contain slang. Your language should be school-appropriate.

Challenge yourself!

* Utilize literary devices (similes, metaphors, allusions, sensory imagery, etc.)
* Design your sentences with intention.
* Describe yourself without saying “I am”—indicate your tastes, values, experiences, your interests, a range of emotions or a very precise feeling.
* Write about a single experience or action (see definition of memoir).
* Include ***strong*** verbs, **descriptive** adjectives/adverbs, and **specific** nouns.
* Use a thesaurus to help you find powerful and descriptive words.

1. **Illustrate** three of your memoirs on a separate sheet of paper. This sheet does not need to be anywhere near perfect or complete. It is meant to get you thinking about how you might illustrate your final six-word memoir. **Number your illustrations** so I can tell which of your ten 6-word memoirs the illustration goes with.
2. Choose your best six-word memoir and **create a single PowerPoint slide**. Your slide should contain the following:
   * Your name and class period
   * Your best six-word memoir
   * An image or illustration
3. Email me your completed slide using your psd150.org email account ([kara.lycke@psd150.org](mailto:kara.lycke@psd150.org)).

**Rubric for 6-Word Memoir**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Graded Parts** | **Points possible** | **Points earned** |
| **Formative**   * Completion of packet * 10 draft 6-word memoirs * Illustrations | 10 points  10 points  10 points |  |
| **Summative--PowerPoint slide**   * Final version of your best six-word memoir * Image or illustration to compliment your memoir in a creative way * Your name on the slide * Emailed to me in the correct format and on time. * Correct/appropriate spelling, grammar, punctuation. * Effective use of language (literary devices, description, strong verbs, etc.) | 30 points |  |
| **Total** | **60 points** |  |