# CHAPTER SIXTEEN
# TRUE STORIES

Like directions and invented stories, true stories are a kind of discourse that for the most part follows chronological order. By and large, the final two chapters, *INFORMATION* and *IDEAS*, deal with generalizations built up from true stories. So these three concluding chapters roughly trace an order of increasingly more comprehensive knowledge-making.

True stories derive from memory and investigation, depending on whether the narrator experienced or witnessed the events firsthand or learned about them secondhand. Reminiscence is unsought, investigation sought. The techniques of reportage and research that students learn in order to tell other people's stories prepare for the fuller investigation treated in *INFORMATION*. True stories cover much nonfiction, a lot of which traditionally belongs to social studies and science, like field reports and case studies, but that schools ordinarily don't take up either there *or* in language arts.

Students can receive and present true stories in the same range of media arrayed in the last chapter for invented stories on page 334. Videotaping with dialogue and voice-over makes for fine documentaries. See page 108 for ways to stage stories of real events. Here we shall emphasize reading and writing.

## WRITING FROM RECOLLECTION

Autobiographical material comes to mind largely as nonverbal data, thereby providing a valuable opportunity for languaging, for shifting into words what as yet is a mixture of feeling, sensation, image, and thought. As one struggles to put personal experience into language, the experience itself becomes perceived, clarified, distanced, symbolized, ordered, understood, and even mastered in a new way. Telling their own true stories ensures that students will deal with certain problems of abstracting and composing and will know thereby the nature of such information when they encounter it as readers. In sharing the stories of their lives, moreover, they not only master their personal experience but learn how to create a rich community with others.

### ■ LETTERS

Inasmuch as letters spread news, they're a major way of telling true stories, a way children understand because they're addressed to people the writer knows. Corre-

sponding, as we said in discussing letters on page 309, essentially shifts conversation to paper and hence is a comfortable sort of writing. Children keeping calendars or diaries, as recommended below, can use these as reference when they write a letter to some friend or relative telling what they've been doing recently. Encourage students of any age to address occasional entries of their diaries or journals to someone they actually would like to tell about particular events in their lives—and to mail that off as a real letter.

Advice-column letters contain personal stories of all sorts, true at least from the viewpoint of the writer. Published letters offer readers a fresh view of history undigested by others, a view that retains the feel of the time and allows readers to draw their own conclusions. The letters of Nicola Sacco provide an internal view of the celebrated Sacco-Vanzetti case. Others, like Pliny's letter to Tacitus, give a vivid true story of a historical event such as the destruction of Pompeii. Whatever a student's interests, some correspondence exists related to it, because letters by people in all fields have been published—Columbus' letters to Queen Isabella, Van Gogh's letters to his brother, Bernard Shaw's and Ellen Terry's correspondence, George Jackson's letters from prison, Laura Ingalls Wilder's *West From Home*, E.B. White's *Letters*, and so on. Of course these correspondences often contain much more than news of events, but this will help students see how much one's thoughts and feelings surround events and are themselves events of a sort. (For fictional letters see page 351.)

## ■ CALENDAR

Memory is often aided by personal records. Keeping a calendar leaves a simple day-by-day record of what one is either scheduled to do or has done. Very young children can make up one large class calendar on tagboard with blocks for each day of one month. Then together they can write in or dictate entries for each day. The next step is for each child to keep his own calendar. Repeated writing of the names for the days and months should ensure learning to spell them.

Explain that many adults write notes to themselves on a calendar so that they will remember things they have planned to do—what, when, where, who, and perhaps other things. Then say that some people keep a diary of what they do and what happens around them so that they can look back later and recall what went on. This is like writing a real day-to-day story in pieces. They write for themselves, in whatever way the words come, not being held to complete sentences or to dressing things up for the teacher. They may draw decorations and illustrations on the calendar. Writing into calendars leads easily into keeping the other periodic records described below and should be a small child's way of starting to keep a diary.

## ■ DIARY

Like a calendar, a diary is a day-by-day true story, based on the memory of very recent events, noted within a day or so of occurrence and kept for later use. What is unique about calendars, diaries, journals, and logs is their serial nature; the writer's point of view is at once beyond some events and yet still in the middle of others.

In addition to their writer's notebook, reading journals, learning logs, and other sorts of special written records that students might keep at one time or

another, or concurrently, they may well want to keep a personal diary as an ongoing account of what they're doing and feeling. You might allow time in class for a while to help establish the habit of keeping a diary. Come to some agreement with students about who, if anyone, is to see it. The best policy is to let the diarist decide whether to show some entries to you or someone else.

Privacy may ensure more full and honest material, but some students will want you to read and perhaps respond to what they write. Obviously, diarists will often register not only events but the circumstances of the events, including their thoughts and feelings. Trust is critical. And of course maturity and temperament of the individual are big factors. Many teachers offer to respond regularly to diaries by passing them back and forth. Students may leave facing pages blank for you or some other respondent to write in. This creates one sort of double-entry diary that becomes a kind of dialogue. Encourage students also to write some entries as letters and mail them to absent people to whom they like to tell certain events.

Another sort of double-entry diary consists of responding to one's own entries after a lapse of several weeks or months. As diarists realize how differently they often view events from a later perspective—especially true during the years of rapid growth—they come to value this sort of recording from *within* the events.

### USING DIARIES FOR LATER WRITING

Part of this value inheres in the experience itself of keeping a diary, but part of it lies in the mining of the diary as a source document for further projects. As diarists reread entries, encourage them to look for:

- a particular entry or event that might be elaborated or revised into an account of an incident.
- a series or scatter of events that might be stripped out and told as a coherent story.
- a long, continuous section of a diary that can be summarized and recast to focus on some important continuity that began and ended during that period—an action or set of conditions.

Encourage students to omit dates when rewriting, to delete and add material freely, and to rearrange and reword anything as needed to fit the new purpose. Rewriting diary material will create some of the autobiography and memoir described farther on.

PURPOSES. Plucking from or summarizing diaries confronts students with some excellent compositional issues in selecting and shaping the relatively miscellaneous material that accumulates from an ongoing recording of daily life. At the same time, it helps young people see patterns or connections in this apparent miscellany, that is, find meaning in their lives.

Furthermore, students' very strong interest in each other's lives is something we have often observed among students of all ages. It gives them a great incentive to read what their classmates have written. They want to know each other better but do not feel free to show this interest very directly to ones they don't already know well. Reading rewritten diaries overcomes this obstacle and allows young people to see what peers are making of *their* lives.

As a habit, diary writing can become a period of meditation and self-collection. It is also a time to rehearse one's writing alone, just as young children learning to talk rehearse speech alone in their crib before falling off to sleep. It's

relaxed practice. The students can make of it what they want—and what they make of it may continually change. But because they will write under the influence of present circumstances and in a particular state of mind, the entries will inevitably become in some sense a record.

The whole process is a way of phasing writing from spontaneous, private notation to selective, public composition. The selecting and summarizing entailed in working over diary material also gives students some fundamental research experience by having them abstract from a document of their own as they might do with documents created by others. Other purposes are to help make writing habitual and natural; to give importance to everyday occurrences and feelings; to encourage the notation of specific things of the moment; and to create a record of long enough duration to provide earlier and later perspectives on the same events.

### PARALLEL READING

In their search for meaning and role models youngsters gravitate to true-life stories of people they can identify with or emulate. Published diaries written by such people but usually not *for* publication afford young readers an especially revealing interior view of experiences they're concerned with—such as how these personages handled problems they too face. Adolescents especially turn inward as puberty and relations with peers and elders force them to reflect on who they are and where they stand. From reading published diaries adolescents obtain a model for introspection. Since diaries are usually shelved in libraries with biography and autobiography, students can look them up by the name of a person who interests them, or simply stumble on them while browsing through those other kinds of true stories.

Have available diaries of adventures such as *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* by Arlene Blum or *The Overland and Oregon Trail Diary of Mary Louise Block in 1865* by Bert Webber. Diaries also provide a rich source of information about other periods of history. For example, Queen Victoria's diary gives fresh vitality to a historical personage now a household word. Whether kept by those who made history like George Washington or Thomas Edison, or those like Anne Frank, Anaïs Nin, and Samuel Pepys who experienced it in some quintessential way, diaries are a primary source document from which, students should learn, history as we know it is distilled.

## ■ JOURNAL

Educators use the term "journal" for many different kinds of notebooks, and it's so often used in common parlance as a synonym for "diary' and "log" that confusion easily results. We are defining a journal as more specialized or topical than a diary, which is more miscellaneous. It follows one set of experiences relevant to a single activity, relationship, school subject, and so on, like reading and learning journals. Because a journal in this sense has a more distinct practical purpose relating to an external subject or to other people, it tends to be less confidential. A log is still more spare and impersonal. But terms are unimportant so long as distinctions are made (see "Log" on page 370).

The sort of journal that concerns true stories tracks some enterprise and thus becomes an extended sort of eyewitness reportage of its progress. Students choose any enterprise they may be part of or witness to.

PROCEDURE

Activity directions might suggest this:

- Choose an activity or changing situation that you'll be participating in or observing for several weeks or months and want to keep a record of. This could be learning to play a musical instrument or to master a sport, training a pet, or watching a process. It could be observing play rehearsals or practice sessions of a team or the construction of a building in the community or the seasonal changes in a particular square yard of ground.
- Record in your journal frequent observations of the progress or development of whatever you have chosen to observe. If relevant, take photos or whatever other samples may register stages of your activity.
- Meet from time to time with your writing group or some conferencer and either read or summarize your journal to them. Talk about the material you're getting and begin to plan how you might use it later.
- When the enterprise has ended, talk the journal over with a view to what you might do with it for whatever purpose you have in mind.

The journals may be considered pieces of writing for their own sake that could be edited and printed, or as material to summarize or rewrite in some other way. Photos plus narration based on the journal make good slide presentations and are particularly suitable for pet or plant growth, construction, rehearsal progress, etc.

PARALLEL READING

To read how Columbus himself reported what he found, what slaves themselves recounted of slavery, what Lewis and Clark said it was like to encounter Indians, how Davy Crockett and fellow defenders spent the last days at the Alamo, or how Captain Scott spent the last hours of his belated and fatal return from the South Pole—is to feel history come alive as it rarely does in the synoptic surveys based on such documents. The lab and field notes of scientists often constitute journals, like Charles Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, a naturalist's record of the flora and fauna encountered, which students can compare with *Two Years Before the Mast*, a travelog journal of many of the same places visited during the same era by Richard Henry Dana.

## ■ ABOUT ME

Most primary children enjoy putting together booklets about themselves, the first few of which may have to be dictated to an aide. They don't much distinguish stories from other sorts of discourse. So expect their "stories" to include accounts of their routines, descriptions of pets, lists of favorite things, characterizations of family members, and so on as well as some actual narratives. Don't try to get them to sort out this mixture; they will differentiate kinds of discourse later as they discover reasons to talk along different lines for different purposes and as they see the variety of things older people are doing with discourse. But this sort of writing provides one of the ways in which true stories emerge.

## ■ MEMORY WRITING

Writing true stories based on diaries and journals provides a fine link to the writing of autobiography and memoir based on reminiscence. But recollective writing differs from diaries or letters in spanning a longer lapse between the experience and its recording. Also, diaries and journals act as memory aids for recalling, so that abstracting from them involves a somewhat different compositional process than writing from reminiscence alone, which is the kind of writing we take up here.

When we select from and summarize a diary or journal, we're doing consciously what the memory does all the time. It has its own way of composing experience, of which we are mainly unaware. It selects, summarizes, stores, and retrieves experience according to a classification and filing system based on some buried assumptions about what's meaningful or valuable or interrelated. Memory is not a miscellaneous heap but a growing knowledge structure into which new experience is being assimilated. At the moment of recall, memories exist already in significantly digested form, and we feel they're part of us. So no matter what subject matter they are *about*, memories are personal. They're a rich and various source of any writer's material, already mixed with his thought and feeling.

The question is how to *continue* the composing of experience already begun in memory, how to *re-collect* them. Students need some ways of tapping off this prime content and shaping it into one of the many kinds of discourse it stocks. Practically everything we do elicits memories, precisely because they're bound into our knowledge structure by networks of associations. Help students stay alert to these spontaneous memories and save some in their writer's notebook or other notes. See page 411 for special ways of witnessing the stream of consciousness, of which memories constitute an important part. Here we suggest how to deliberately gain access to the memory store at any time.

One teacher placed around the room several blown-up photographs of provocative subjects and then asked students to write down a memory that one of the pictures reminded them of. A sixth grader wrote this:

> *I remember when I was a little girl. I was singing a rain song. It was cold with the splashing of the rain in the puddles. The frogs were cracking, the skies were black and all the duck were saying quack quack. I loved to walk in the rain, it made me feel so clean inside. Although it was cold around me I was warm and safe.*[1]

### PROCEDURE

The basic way is to break into the network of associations at some point and travel a while along some of its connections, making notes along the way. If your students don't seem ready to engage in the process below, start with show-and-tell, which can focus on true stories (page 77) if the directions say to bring in something from which there hangs a tale. Orally sharing these tales stimulates memory chains so that tellers remember more detail from being prompted and so that listeners recall additional memories from hearing others'. After swapping stories orally, they may write them down.

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[1] From the Harvard-Boston Summer School located in the Roxbury section of Boston, Massachusetts.

As with sensory writing, you might work once through the sequence below with all your students so that they can repeat it henceforth on their own. The directions below are addressed to the student.

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1. SPONTANEOUS FLOW OF MEMORIES *Look around the room at different things until something you see reminds you of something from your past—a place, person, or event. Write that down. Now what other memory does that person, place, or event remind you of? Once you get started, keep writing down your memories. Capture each one quickly. Don't worry about their being jumbled or jumping from one time to another. Write the memories in whatever way captures them quickly; these are notes for yourself. Don't worry about spelling or correct sentences; just record as many memories as you have time for. Stop in about fifteen minutes. These notes will be used for a later activity. For right now, it's better to get a lot of memories than to go into detail about one of them.*

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Some students may mistake mere thought associations for memory links, so that *flag* might lead to *patriotism* and to *Fourth of July* and so on. Or some may keep returning so often to the room that they never get out of it. Present sensation is only a springboard, and once in the past, one stays there unless the chain breaks, at which time one returns to the surroundings for a new point of departure. To make the process clear, demonstrate it yourself first. Look around the room, settle on an object, and tell the students something it reminds you of that happened once; then say what other memory that brings to mind, and so forth. Jot these in short form on the chalkboard. You might then ask a student or two to volunteer to do what you just did. Then have everyone write his flow of memories as directed above.

Afterwards, ask for two or three volunteers to read or project their papers, or portions of them. Ask the group to discuss the different ways these writers used to note down their memories. Then ask the rest of the class to look at their own papers and say how they went about it. Let them consider the relative advantages of list, telegraphic, and full styles, including the issue of coverage versus detail. Since they're registering their own memories, they can control the speed of the material better than when recording external events, as in sensory recording.

Again use a couple of samples from volunteers to start discussion, this time about the *sequences* of recollections. Why did memory A lead to memory B and so on? What feeling, idea, or mood seems to connect the memories? The class can speculate about what the networks of associations are in the sample papers, then ask the authors for corroboration. Next they look at their own papers and share what they understand links their memories.

You can consider these questions as you read these notes by a student in a fourth-and-fifth-grade class. Writing pell-mell to get down a lot fast encourages some children to spin out the longer, more complex sentence constructions that they will try out freely when talking but will not often risk in writing. We've underlined two especially exemplary passages.

> *I see a top of a house and it is white. It reminds me of going up to maine at my grandparents cottage. that reminds me of the time Gail. Robin and I and Nancy were in maine and hid in someones pyle of hay when they came bye. The White on the house also reminds me of the ski slopes when I first when on them. That reminds me of up in maine when we went to bonds. We called to 17 year old tommy manahan who lives two houses away in maine a boy scout as he went by. That reminds me of when my family and I went to the end of the lake and*

*saw the lake and the ocean be divided by a huge metal that was aquad shape and sliding down the slide that lead to the ocean. That reminds me of when I first learned to water ski I fell and fell and then I Finally got up and made it First time around. That reminds me of when I caught my First Fish. It turned out to be a gold Fish. The remind me of when we went to canipe lake Park and I went on the biggest Roller coaster in New England. I also went on the house of seven gables and you see statues and I saw a statue of a man having his head sawe in half and going throw the huge barrels. That remind me of when I was four and went to boston with my mother. The reminds me of when I first learned to dive at Hayden day camp. That reminds me off the time Gail, Robin, and me went up the dirt road in maine and picked Blueberrys and rasberrys. That reminds me of the time I almost Drownded waterskíng. that reminds me of the time gail and nancy and I went in Mrs. Pratts canal*

Some students, like the author of the sample below, may use a form of shorthand and produce very skeletal notes. The memory chain below began with spotting a flutaphone in the classroom.[2]

*boring music* *practicing at home*
*Miss Brown* *practicing piano* *having to take time for it*
*chorus* *piano lessons* *recitals* *getting up early*
*for practices* *performances* *riding lessons*

2. EXPANDING A SINGLE MEMORY *Look over your notes from step 1 and pick out a memory of some incident that interests you and that might interest other people. To help you decide, read or tell to partners a couple of possibilities from your paper. An "incident" would be something that happened on a particular day, unless you feel that what happened on two or three different occasions goes together as one memory.*

*Now think about that memory and for about fifteen minutes write down, as notes for yourself still, all the details you can recall that are connected with it. What did you see, touch, smell, hear, or otherwise sense? Let the most important event of that time happen again in slow motion in your mind and describe everything you experienced. Stop the action at the moment your feelings are at their height, and describe that moment in as much detail as possible.*

Let the group compare sample papers from this step with the original notes from step 1. Ask what things the writer selected out in doing step 2. Then ask what new material he added. Once the selection of memory and its expansion in detail have been clearly established, ask the group why they think he chose that memory over the others. Then ask the author.

Now ask what more he might do to it for the sake of an audience. Does he still need more detail about some aspect of it? Does some of the detail seem unnecessary? Unnecessary for what? What seems to be the main point or feeling? This is critical for helping the author get the point of his selected recollection to emerge. Each writer can look at his own paper and apply the discussion to it.

Compare the drily listed flutaphone memories above with the expanded version below:

[2] These two samples are from Franklin Elementary School, Lexington, Massachusetts.

FLUTAPHONE

*Piano lessons remind me of a recital I had this year. The room was full of chairs, each occupied by either someone's mother or a student. I was to play fourth.*

*"Merry is now going to play an English folk song," my teacher announced. I stood up and walked up to the piano. I could hear and feel my heart pumping and wondered if the audience could. When I was done I heard a lot of applause.*

*"Now Merry is going to play a composed song, she composed it." My piano teacher announced, "The name is 'Memories.' "*

*I played my short minor song and turned around to get up.*

*"Please play it again, it's so short and I think the audience will enjoy it more."*

*So I did, got applause and left the piano seat happily.*

The core experience here was obviously pleasure, the flush of success and attention. It's rather hard to find a meaningless memory, since memories stand out for a reason, and the meaning engenders the coherence. Memory writing challenges egocentricity, however, because when we disembed memories to write about them, we can, without realizing it, strip them of the inner context that gives them significance. A composed memory that readers feel is pointless almost always fails to make clear the core experience that made the memory stand out in the first place. Workshop discussion can indicate that more explicitness, or perhaps just a more emphatic handling of facts, is needed.

The memory of the flutaphone recital seems to have emerged sufficiently and to have been written to communicate to others. That's because the author used stage 2 to compose a finished incident while she was expanding the detail. But many stage 2 pieces will still read like notes because the writers will have used it entirely to conjure more detail, in note form, leaving final composing until later. Both may have decided wisely for the memory they chose to work up. In other words, some writers will collapse stage 2 and 3 by an early closure, but others will need the stage below. A good solution might be to let the groups discuss which students should go a stage further and which not, and to give groups the editing function of preparing copy for printing. The project can be to put out magazines of autobiography and memoir.

Another possibility at this stage is to work more than one memory up through stage 2, starting either from the original stage 1 paper or doing a new spontaneous flow of memories. This will give students more choice of material for stage 3.

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3. FINAL COMPOSED MEMORY *Go to your group with your step 1 and step 2 papers. Exchange these with each other. After you've read a partner's, write comments on his step 2 paper that will help him to rewrite it as a finished composition. Consider how the memory has developed so far across the two papers. Do you understand why the writer found this particular experience important and memorable? What things about the memory do you think he should bring out most when he rewrites? What would you like to hear more about? Do you know what he felt and thought at that time? Are there any things the writer should cut out? Do you have suggestions for rewording some sentences?*

*Then exchange papers again until each of you has read each of the papers. Afterward, you may talk with the others about their comments on your step 2. Talk also about what you might do with your finished compositions as a group or separately, if this has not already been decided.*

*Finally, rewrite your step 2 paper. Follow the suggestions the other students made when you agree with them. Make all the big and small changes it takes to make your memory clear and interesting for other people.*

You might copy or project all three papers of a couple of students for discussion, so that everyone can survey the entire process by which those authors got from first to last stage. Discuss the decisions and changes they made between steps 1 and 2, and between step 2 and 3. One way to go about this is to ask the students to guess what choices the author is going to make between one stage and the next; then show the next paper. Get them to relate the writer's progressive decisions to their own judgment about the final version. With one author's papers, you might show step 3 first, then 2, then 1—work backward from the finished product.

Here are all three stages done by one seventh grader.[3]

### SPONTANEOUS FLOW OF MEMORIES

*When I was little, I used to ride my tricycle all through the basement. Thought it was so much fun. When I was about six, there was a fire in our furnace. Two fire engines came. Everyone was running around throwing sand into the furnace. I took someone's hat, my dog, and pretended I was coming to save the day on my horse. They kicked me out! When I was at camp 3 years ago, we took a motor boat, went out to an island, and had an overnight. After we made supper we went fishing off the dock. I fell in the lake & had to be pulled out! I remember when I made a line pulley with my house & the house next door, the girl & I sent messages during the night to each other. I remember the time up at Camp Union, on the last few nights, when we had a square dance. One of the teachers fell off a chair & hurt his legs. I remember the first time I ever came to visit Weeks. Rainy cold. The front door steps looked gigantic.*

### SINGLE EXPANDED MEMORY

AN ISLAND ADVENTURE

*It was a muggy night, during the summer 3 years ago. Up in Oakland, maine. We were going to an island in the middle of a lake for an overnight. Motorboat was overloaded with people, food & sleeping bags. Front of the boat was high in the air. Waves from the boat were all white & foamy. Water was splashing through the air, causing it to be chilly for a few minutes. Many trees on the island. A few lashings between these trees. Long dock. Washing pots and pans in lake. A fish swam into one girl's pots. Screaming and running. Fishing—something tugged at my line and pulled me into the lake. All wet. Had to be pulled out! Pitching tents—got conked on the head with some else's stake. The ground was very hard to sleep on. Heard loons crying. Sounded very weird. Two other girls crawled into my tent because we were all scared. It collapsed on all of us. We were too tired to put it up again so we left it down until the morning.*

### FINAL COMPOSED MEMORY

AN ISLAND OVERNIGHT

*It was a muggy night during the summer about three years ago, up in Maine. We were going by motorboat to an island in the middle of a lake for an overnight trip. The motorboat was overloaded with people, food and sleeping bags, and the front of it was high in the air. The waves from the boat were like soapsuds in a washing machine. Water was splashed through the air, causing it to be chilly for a few minutes.*

[3] At Weeks Junior High School in Newton, Massachusetts.

*There were many trees on the island and a few lashings between them. After supper we decided to go fishing off the long docks extending from the island. We dug up some worms & hooked and baited out poles. I stood on the edge of the dock waiting for a bite.*

*Suddenly I felt a small tug on my line. I got very excited and pulled slightly. This time I felt that my line was being pulled out of my hands. I thought that I had caught a large fish and kept struggling. I pulled the rod back until the string was taught. The next thing I knew was that I was sitting in the lake. My line had gotten knotted with someone else's and we were both on different sides of dock so that we couldn't see each other. She thought that I was a fish when I pulled on the lines. I also thought that she was a fish when she pulled back. I was so embarrassed! I had to be pulled out of the lake because the bank was too slippery to climb up.*

*That night when we pitched the tents, I got conked on the head with a stake & was knocked out. That was quite an experience!*

It would be good to have a number of finished compositions read aloud or printed up to give the class an idea of the variety of memory writing, like different points and moods but especially the differentiation into the kinds of autobiography and memoir treated below. In fact, booklets made by compiling all the finished compositions could be specialized somewhat by sorting memories according to which feature the author (autobiography) or other people, animals, or places (memoir). Of course, students might want to sort and print them by some other categories, almost any of which would help them think more about the variety of viewpoints and subjects that memories afford.

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PURPOSES

If you think about how much of writing in the later years, and of adult writing, draws on memory for its material, and if you acknowledge the universality of the compositional issues entailed in memory writing, then you see how central recollection is to discourse. Together, sensations and memories are the individual's storehouse, from which—however bizarrely imaginative or abstractly formulated—much of his writing must necessarily proceed. Writing down sensations and memories not only shows students that the real stuff of speaking and writing lies all around them and within them at any moment, but it validates this stuff; it says plainly that their individual experience is of great worth, something to turn to and make use of.

Not all of people's recordings and reportings get written, but they occur inside anyway, and we further abstract these into the generalities according to which we see the world and according to which we take action. When these processes are themselves the basis of activities, then writing becomes an external and explicit reflection of what ordinarily happens inwardly and hiddenly. Students can thus gradually become aware of how they know what they know, and of how their experience shapes their thought. Their fancies and fictions are merely a different mode of making knowledge from these same raw materials. By spreading the composing over stages, we can lay bare and influence the internal processes of writing. This phasing of composition is the heart of what's meant by the "process approach" to writing. This staged activity here can help establish it for students.

Another reason for staging the process is to avoid a student's telling the gist of a memory so quickly that it's lifeless. Writing from detail in the first place helps avoid this problem, whereas writing from topics invites the problem of

paucity. Not only do topics work poorly as a stimulant for stories, they (1) can deaden the writing by categorizing students' experience for them in advance, (2) preclude discovery by the student of the significance of the memory and of the particular feeling or mood that can provide coherence for it, (3) bypass the most worthwhile compositional issues that learners should grapple with.

The underlying goal in spontaneous memory writing is to keep composition on a deeper, cognitive basis, since at heart it's the shaping of experience into understanding. Selecting one incident from a memory stream narrows down the first, miscellaneous array. Expanding into detail fills in what one had staked out, like pointing to a city on a map and then looking at the inserted plan of that city. Stage 3 finishes organizing and verbalizing the reminiscence to make its significance emerge for an audience.

Thus the student is working up inductively from a wealth of material instead of working downward deductively by trying to flesh out a given abstraction. Writing deductively from topics has a place higher up the abstraction ladder if learners are generating their own topics. Both sensory and memory writing are harder than topical assignments, because they pose greater difficulties for the writer's egocentricity and thus demand more objectification. The point of any process is not to avoid problems; it is to engage with the right problems in the right way. Phased memory writing does this extremely well.

## ■ AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Students who have gained some fluency with summoning memories through the process above may at the outset aim more directly toward the kind of outcome they want. Do they want to tell what it's like to undergo a certain experience, as protagonist, or to report what they witnessed, as an observer? This distinction between autobiography and memoir is really just a compositional way of thinking about one's subject. If one is not simply fishing among memories but beckoned by a particular memory, it's the subject or content of that memory that a writer thinks of first and honors most. But point of view and focus go with the subject matter. Whether one was protagonist or witness during the real events determines whether one tells a recollected true story as autobiography or as memoir. Inasmuch as *how* a story is told can't be separated from what the story is *about*, form and content are factors of each other.

Another case in point concerns another distinction. To simplify the basic memory writing above, we suggested that students choose an *incident*, something that happened once in a short period of time. If the span of time and space covered by some action broadens out over many incidents and different places, the writer has a much greater problem controlling the material. The problem is basically cognitive, because the *concept* of an incident in someone's life is much simpler than the concept of a *phase* of it. This distinction in time-space coverage entails differences in abstractive tasks for the writer that should become issues in writing workshops and conferences.

Writing a phase rather than an incident of autobiography can be defined by activity directions, but they most likely will not so much prompt this kind of writing as help a writer see what kind of writing certain recollections are calling for:

> Tell what happened to you during a certain period of your life covering many months, perhaps even a year or so—some *phase* that seems to have had its own beginning and end.

## ISSUES FOR THE WRITING WORKSHOP

To distill a period of weeks, months, or years in even one to two thousand words requires drastic editing of events. It is this editing process that teaches. Two main issues characterize it. What idea of "phase" does the writer use as his criterion for relevance in selecting and emphasizing? And what efforts does he make to offset the abstractness of summary? The crux of the writing challenge lies in some balance between precise actualities—what people did, said, felt, and so on—and some all-encompassing theme—a notion of a trial gone through, a stage of growth experienced, a set of circumstances lived through, a relationship developed. The author may not need to state the theme directly, depending on how obvious it will be to the reader, which is not always an easy thing to guess in advance. However, in order to get it across he'll have to organize the memory thematically as well as chronologically.

Unless written as résumés for a job application, fragments of autobiography lacking the concrete qualities of the original events and feelings will probably be boring and pointless. And yet, if the author narrates too much in detail, quotes too often, and stays entirely in moments of the past, he cannot come near to encompassing in the length of an article what happened over a period of months. To preserve vividness under these conditions calls for shrewdness about when to pull in for a "close-up" of a certain scene and when to summarize in a few sentences the less important or repetitive events. Although necessarily more abstract as a whole than an incident, a phase need not be more abstract in its parts. A general statement about what occurred "in the meantime," or what occurred habitually over a long period, can be cast into concrete words and phrases and specific references.

Most accounts of a phase combine narrative with essay. That is, either the paper generally progresses chronologically but contains topical paragraphs in which time stands still while a general point is made, or the progression is a development of general points illustrated by bits of narrative taken out of chronological order. These organizations naturally occur because a portion of autobiography has the double goal of telling what happened while saying what that means.

Meaning is a matter of time perspective. What enables a writer to disengage a thematic unity from the welter of past facts is a certain emotional distance. From a remoter vantage point one can see patterns. Autobiography is characterized by binocular vision: the writer splits into I-now and I-then, which means that he looks at events from the remembered viewpoint of the past and from his present viewpoint. When we say that *Great Expectations* is told from Pip's point of view, or *To Kill a Mockingbird* from Scout's, we mean, of course, that they are told from the points of view of two middle-aged narrators who have framed their childhood perspective within their later perspective. Compare *Catcher in the Rye*, narrated a year after the events, with *A Separate Peace*, narrated fifteen years later. How well a student succeeds in defining themes, then, will depend partly on how far he stands from the events in time. Discussions of papers should allow for time lapses and consequent perspectives. The very effort to write large-scope autobiography may help to induce a maturer perspective.

## PARALLEL READING

Most autobiographies are full-length and mix incidents with phases, such as Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Agnes de Mille's *Dance to the Piper*, Helen Keller's *Story of My Life*, Sybil Leek's *Diary of a Witch*, Charles

Lindbergh's *We*, Mickey Mantle's *The Education of a Baseball Player*, Louis Nizer's *My Life in Court*, Gordon Parks's *A Choice of Weapons*, Richard Rodriguez' *Hunger of Memory*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, or Yevgeny Yevtushenko's *A Precocious Autobiography*.

A major motive for young people to read autobiography, and biography as well, is to search for role models and to identify with persons who have done what the reader would like to do. There are a great many fine autobiographies written by members of minority groups. Readers should have access to those of their own ethnic culture. Also, a splendid way to learn about a type of career or subject area is to read an autobiography of someone immersed in it.

We suggest a triple juxtaposition in the curriculum—of student autobiography, fictional autobiography, and actual published autobiography. A valuable interaction of the three takes place, we believe, in the minds of students and gives considerable dimension as well to their discussion of each. A group can read in common a fragment of true autobiography for discussion. Then each student can read a whole autobiography by some person who interests him.

## ■ MEMOIR

Like autobiography, memoir is first-person narration. But some journals are as much about others as about the writer, and any first-person writing can center on subjects other than the self. Memoir is the bridge between author focus and other focus. Information is still firsthand, though the subject is in third person. These directions could elicit memoirist writing:

> Tell an incident that you witnessed in the past in which you were involved only as an observer. Re-create it as you saw it and include your reactions at the time.

In memoir, too, it may be useful to distinguish an incident from some longer period requiring, like a phase, thematic summary.

Differentiating memoir into reminiscence about animals and nature, a place, a person, or group specializes the subjects of it in a way that may help students realize that they have memories they would like to tell about. These different subjects of one's recollection also correspond to different kinds of third-person writing—reportage, biography, chronicle, and history. Memoir serves as the hinge, then, between recollection and investigation, personal and transpersonal knowledge.

These different subjects of memory, furthermore, derive from different informant roles that the memoirist played at the time of the events recalled. An informant who is not a participant in events can know them by only three personal means—by observing firsthand, by being privy to what the participants in the action know, and by being privy to what a local community knows where the action occurred. Let's call these three informant roles *eyewitness*, *confidant*, and *chorus* (like the chorus in Greek drama). By arraying kinds of writing according to these roles we can help students sort out and discuss their memory writing and parlay it into investigative counterparts.

### NATURE MEMOIR

Nonhuman subjects require no confidant or chorus roles, only eyewitness. Young people identify a lot with animals and are strongly drawn to nature. One of us

read more than one hundred memoirs of nature incidents written by junior high students, was hardly bored a single time, and was astonished by the fullness, the interest, and the generally high quality of the accounts, even when some of the authors obviously lacked verbal skill. Small children have already stored many images and experiences of the nonhuman world if only memories of pet behavior, weather, and objects in their home and community. All youngsters can recall great amounts of knowledge about *things*, living and inanimate, the assimilation of many incidents or moments that they simply witnessed. People are born recorders, the young most of all. Help them frame writing projects to tap this huge storehouse. Some such memoirs may pinpoint an incident, others may summarize recurring acts into a general action. In any case the memoirist played only one informant role—that of eyewitness.

## MEMOIR OF GROUPS AND PLACES

Many memories focus on group behavior, sometimes associated with a place and its atmosphere. Common subjects are families and homes, teams and arenas, employees and workplaces, or special trips or projects. Whereas the memoirist of nature or things writes only from eyewitness information, the memoirist of a group or place may write as both an eyewitness and a member of a chorus that may be the group itself or a community surrounding the group (neighborhood people, for example, who all know what some teen gang or criminal element is doing there).

To tell a group story the author must see something common in the behavior or activities of a number of individuals. They're trying to raise funds for a school, ostracizing some other people, vandalizing for entertainment, and so on. And such a story may recount once-upon-a-time incidents or recurring action, resulting in true *stories* or simply true *descriptions*. Workshop discussion might sort some of this out by way of helping authors to determine which direction they want to go in or how they want to mix these. Summary description of habitual or characteristic recurring action blends into sketch, profile, and personal essay.

## MEMOIR OF A PERSON

Telling about what happened to another individual raises the issue of the confidant role, which for nature and group memoirs may be irrelevant. If the main experience happened to someone else, how does the memoirist know how that person felt? Perhaps in some cases, the inner life here, too, is irrelevant to the events. Maybe the memoirist is writing as an eyewitness or as a member of a chorus, and that external view suffices. But if readers want to know how the protagonist experienced what happened, then only a confidant role will satisfy. How well did the author know the subject? Did the protagonist confide to the author what he felt? Did the memoirist know what happened *only* from this confidence? Only from eyewitnessing? Only from common knowledge of the events in the locality? Or some combination of these?

Since knowledge sources determine some compositional possibilities, workshops can discuss what might best be done with a memoir given the roles that were available to the author. Whereas the demon of autobiography is one's lack of distance, the chief difficulty in writing about others is too much distance. But distance that would work against one handling of a memoir can be turned to an advantage if the composition is reconceived.

Many professional memoirs of people are not stories but character sketches or profiles. Workshops need to become sharp about seeing where pieces of writing stand on a spectrum from narrative to description and about making adjustments to fit the material and the author's intention. Has the author organized by *acts* or by *traits*? Which should dominate in a given case? Portraits may unveil a person or invest him with a nostalgic aura and be equally good writing. But less skillful authors may summarize their subject so much that the reader doesn't feel he has got to know the person himself. In this case the author may need to get back behind the over-digested recollection to some more specific memories of acts that give instances of the traits. Some expanded-memory noting might help.

Try to help students see how their misgivings about a paper may stem from the author's relationship to the subject and hence to his knowledge sources and perspective. Many problems are abstractive, because they concern making meaning out of the material by summarizing it so as to show something. The further the author moves, for example, from an incident to a series of events, from acts to traits, or from individual action to group action, the more he must generalize across particularities. Likewise, having to take an outside point of view about the behavior of animals or of a person the author doesn't know forces the author to *infer* motives and responses. This risk-taking is inherent in forming ideas and should not be avoided, but students need to become aware of what they're doing as they abstract beyond recollection toward reflection.

## PARALLEL READING

Ivan Turgenev's *Sportsman's Notebook*, one of the masterworks of memoir in all literature, runs the gamut of the various combinations of informant roles and of relationships to subjects. One of us used the book for several years with maturer high school students, who seemed drawn rather than repelled by the lower-keyed action, suspense, and climax. Turgenev shows marvelously how to make the most of accidental material and of whatever informant roles fall to the reporter's lot.

Most libraries include a large body of memoir near chronicle and history. The motive for reading memoir is less to learn about the narrator, who may indeed be relatively unimportant, than to find out what he knew about some other people or some enterprise. Many memoirists, for example, are read because they moved in certain social or artistic circles or took part in some government administration or military campaign or scientific exploration. They're valuable as informants privileged to have played confidant, eyewitness, or group-membership roles regarding certain events. So their focus may be close to that of biography or chronicle, and interest in such a memoir depends on prior interest in a given subject.

Memoir presents information in an attractive way—via narrative and personal channels. Whatever topic or activity a student is interested in, he will almost surely find some memoir featuring it. Reading each other's memoirs may help students considerably to value and to pursue this kind of material.

Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley, On the Road with Charles Kuralt*, William L. Heat Moon's *Blue Highways: A Journey into America*, and the *New Yorker*'s "Talk of the Town" department contain accounts and sketches lying somewhere between recollection and investigation, being memoirs of veteran reporters cruising about with an eye out for material.

## WRITING FROM INVESTIGATION

The knowledge that recollection supplies is adventitiously acquired. The knowledge that investigation supplies is deliberately acquired. This difference in source makes composing with each differ also. By the time one starts writing from recollections, they have already been partially composed by the way memory digests experience. By the time one starts writing up some investigation, one has done some visits, interviews, or background research. In both cases some pre-writing activity has gone on—part of it unconsciously accumulated in the mind, another part initiated consciously to find out something "on assignment." Though they influence the writing differently, both the filing-and-retrieval system of memory and the legwork of reportage and research constitute decision-making for knowledge-making and therefore a primal stage of the composing process.

### ■ WAYS OF INVESTIGATING

An investigator goes and looks (eyewitness), goes and asks (confidant), and goes and joins (chorus). That is, he visits, interviews, and (more rarely) immerses himself for a while in a target community. Reportage mimics the ways we acquire knowledge firsthand by chance. But the other part of investigation is research, which goes further into secondhand sources and further from chance to choice. That is, to reportage the investigator adds research into documents, for knowledge previously stored by others, and experimentation, for action that cannot be witnessed unless especially set up and controlled. The document research is scholarship, and the field or laboratory manipulation is science. Naturally, investigative writing combines these sources in various ways, depending on the subject and purpose, that raise different compositional issues, as we will indicate.

We suggest guiding students into investigation by modulating from the informant roles of memoir into kinds of reportage and research that require only one sort of investigating at a time. As students gain experience with more sorts, they begin to mix them for more complex kinds of writing.

Recollective and investigative writing come closest together in notation—preliminary writing as memory aids in the form of diaries and journals, field and lab logs, and journalists' notebooks. Memoirist and researcher alike consciously digest these in drafting their final compositions.

### ■ LOG

Comparable to day-by-day accounts like calendars and journals are logs. These focus not on the narrator but on external events that are noted rapidly and succinctly as in police and ship logs, often by different people. A log can be written like a calendar on a wall chart or in a book with blank blocks or pages for each day's entries.

Students can keep logs of anything that changes—weather, growing plants or animals, sports events. The point is usually to monitor functioning or progress. Observations are made at intervals, and descriptions are recorded as dated entries in the log. These logs can be used to make charts or graphs, summaries of recurring events, or generalizations in the form of informative articles. See *IDEAS* for more on this type of expository writing. Primary-grade children can begin their

logs as drawings with captions; older students can keep a higher proportion of their record in words.

Discoveries that come when growing animals are closely watched in the classroom not only delight learners but provide a rich opportunity for careful observation and accurate reporting. For example, bird, hen, or reptile eggs, a newborn mammal, larvae, or tadpoles can be brought for youngsters to care for and note their food, ideal environment, including temperature, and other requirements. The children can set up a routine for taking care of the animals. Since waiting for an egg to hatch or an animal to reach a new stage may leave little to observe at times, it's best to have more than one thing growing at once. Observation need not be daily if little is happening. With planning—and luck—youngsters can record special events like births, moltings, and metamorphoses. And they can observe at times of particular events, such as the feeding of ladybugs to leopard frogs. The cycles and relationships in nature will teach the most and provide the most interesting material for recording. The child is rare who is not entranced by watching a caterpillar become a butterfly.

An alternative to growth as a project structure is the complex workings of social insects. It's possible to buy "ant farms" that have a transparent wall for observing. At the end of each week or so, youngsters can list the most interesting things from their logs. More mature students might summarize logs into a more abstract sort of reportage in which recurring events and observations are generalized, as pursued in "Report of Experimentation" on page 382.

## ■ EYEWITNESS VISIT

This may take off directly from the sensory recording described in "Writing." Students choose a place or enterprise that they want to know more about or have been assigned to cover for some publication. What goes on here? Who would like to know about it? They observe there, take notes, and write up the visit according to a purpose that they may discuss with partners before the visit and refer to in workshop sessions afterwards.

The reporter of a visit has more options than an eyewitness memoirist because he can choose when and where to observe, which sensations to record at the scene, and how to digest the notes later. But the more miscellaneous material of a visit may require considerable selective shaping before some significance emerges. Random locales are fine if the writer is willing to make more visits than he writes up, or if he develops the sophisticated knack of seeing *something* in *anything*—a great goal to work toward. Specific reasons for choosing a locale or activity will make writing up easier for the beginner. The point of the reportage can be any number of things about the character of the locale, the behavior that goes on there, the atmosphere, and so on.

Remind students of the possibility of poetically rendering what they witness. Writing poems of observation alongside longer prose accounts keeps the writing honed, not only for rendering particulars but for charging them with meaning. See "Haiku" on page 396. If reporters keep the option of narrative poetry constantly in mind when visiting, they may more readily understand how, even in prose, they can make an apparent miscellany cohere by perceiving patterns in at least some of the action or by giving it a little metaphorical or symbolic spin, as the tenth grader did in the following poem, the best three sentences he wrote all year.

EIGHT BALL

*He breaks the two to the side pocket right,*
*With kaleidescope colors runs the three through the seven,*
*Then banks the one true on the green.*
*With sweat-laden fingers he powders the cue*
*And calls the eight left corner down.*
*The white knight charges, ramming*
*The black towards the awaiting*
*Abyss and*
*In.*[4]

Workshop deliberations should help an author pick up on and pluck out such possibilities, whatever he does with the remaining material.

The workshop can also help a reporter decide how much to include himself as observer. First person is neither good nor bad. When should a reporter give his account a strong personal touch? Should he stay out entirely, play lightly in and out, or color all that he sees with his own reactions? Only consideration of the material and purpose can answer such questions. Is the reportage going into a school newspaper? If so, what department? A magazine of local sketches? Is the writer compiling a collection of his own? Or perhaps the reportage will feed into a project about a certain subject, like animal behavior, for which the locale was chosen.

Regarding newspapers, if students identify certain "stories" in advance, such as a parade, a store opening, a strike, or a political rally, they should have a ready focus for some good eyewitness reportage. Students who need this given focus may report this more conventional news, while writers who have developed the knack of composing randomness into a short sketch might take on the optional offbeat stories.

## PARALLEL READING

Besides journalism itself, collections of eyewitness reportage in the classroom can include transcripts of sportscasts or other blow-by-blow accounts of action; miscellaneous accounts characterizing a place rather than reporting news; travelogues; single short eyewitness incidents; and first-person accounts by professional reporters that show their eyewitnessing before it gets written up into impersonal third-person newspaper stories. Most reportage is based on more than eyewitnessing alone, as developed below (see *Twentieth Century Reporting at Its Best*, edited by Louis Snyder and Richard Morris, Walt Whitman's *Civil War*, edited by Bryce Rucker, and *By-Line: Ernest Hemingway*).

For many students, "action" or "event" may mean only rapid movement on a large scale. To offset this limited notion as well as to introduce them to some of the relevant literature of nature reportage, acquaint them with Karl von Frisch's *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses, and Language*, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, and the books of Gerald Durrell, John Muir, Farley Mowat, Peter Mathiessen, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, and Annie Dillard. A great many poems, like

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[4] From Phillips Exeter Academy.

many of Robert Frost's, are first-person narrations of action the poet observed—people's behavior or other action in nature.

## ■ VISIT PLUS INTERVIEW

While going and looking, youngsters should be gaining experience also in going and asking, treated on page 383 as "What Other Persons Know." Combining visits with interviews, in fact, provides the material for a great percentage of feature journalism as well as a natural follow-up to simple I-am-a-camera visits. Eyewitnessing of some scene or enterprise often needs to be supplemented by querying people on site about aspects of the activity that can't be seen or heard. Television reporters often let the camera do the eyewitnessing and interview participants or observers to garner what the camera cannot capture—invisible background information and personal reactions.

Students ready to go look *and* ask can simply choose locales or enterprises where looking isn't likely to tell the whole story. But maybe they won't know this until *after* a visit. Suppose, for example, they visit a juvenile court but in trying to report on it realize they don't understand some of the terms and the significance of some of the action. That's fine. They will have felt the need to query people on site and probably a reason to return prepared for this. Indeed, repeated visits and interviews at the same locale or enterprise make for more challenging in-depth reportage.

## ■ ORAL HISTORY

Everybody knows lots of true stories, some of which would interest other people just for their general human interest or because they are funny or horrifying or revealing. Children may have heard such memorable stories passed down or around in the family and may in fact know them well enough just to write them down in their own words. Groups can pool these and make booklets of them.

One form of interviewing is just to ask others to tell you true stories from *their* memories. Directed perhaps by an activity card, younger children can elicit stories from relatives, family friends, peer friends, and others they feel comfortable with and can get easy access to. They can tape, transcribe, and edit these stories, or they can just listen and write them down later in their own words. Children will enjoy swapping these through bulletin boards or booklets, perhaps even categorizing them into funny, scary, and so on.

With social experience and confidence, students can venture to call on people around the neighborhood or community whom they don't know but who know true stories they would like to hear—oldtimers full of the past or veterans of some interesting way of life or members of another ethnic group. We have found that students too shy or timorous to do these interviews alone really enjoy doing them with a partner or two. A small group also thinks of more questions to ask, to get the subject to elaborate the story, and can collaborate on putting the story together later in writing.

If the interviewers have drawn out the story in bits and pieces, or if the interviewee has backed up a lot, the group may end by re-composing the story consid-

erably, whether working from a tape, notes, or their collective memories. Photos taken of the subject and habitat during the interview can illustrate booklets of these stories, which can be titled according to subjects or themes stories may have in common.

Get copies of the *Foxfire* books and other work by Eliot Wigginton and associates, who pioneered in oral history as a school activity and who now promote student investigation of other sorts as well, such as described in this chapter and *INFORMATION*. The original impetus was to capture the waning Appalachian folklore of a corner of Georgia. Enabling students to publish their work as magazines and books has contributed much to both the education of the students and to the preservation of regional lore and history. The Foxfire projects stand as an inspiring example of realistic learning because they embed writing in broader activities that include the sources and purposes of the writing.[5]

Their publications sometimes mix stories with accounts of folk ways of making things and other local lore. At other times the publications specialize in only one sort of oral information at a time—history, remedies, customs, etc. Students elsewhere might organize projects similarly to cover, say, only oral history or to mix it with other lore so as to create a composite picture of a whole way of life. Such projects can offer a way for young people to deepen their understanding of their own ethnic background and to find out about other ethnic cultures.

## ■ BIOGRAPHY

A biography is a story of what happened to someone other than the narrator. Unless the story dwells only on external action, the big compositional issue concerns how the narrator knows what the person experienced. The sources of information vary considerably according to whether the subject is alive and whether, if so, the author has access to him as confidant. Does the author know the person, or can he arrange to interview him?

Much depends also on whether the story will cover all of a person's life, or only a phase of it, or a thread stripped out of it. Undertaking a full-dress biography may exceed the capacity of all but the most advanced students, since even a compact vita is very difficult to pull off without synopsizing to the point of aridity. We assume other students will be writing only part of another's life story.

Children can write simple true stories about a relative or friend by drawing on what they already know and by asking for more, illustrating these written-up accounts with snapshots and drawings.

Older youngsters choose an interesting person in their school or community to go watch and talk to—a person with a special skill or past, a political leader, a person in an interesting job, and so on. In fact, a major motivation for youngsters is to sort out possible careers for themselves by getting to know the lives of people who have chosen certain lines of work.

Students will also choose subjects for biography who represent other role models, such as successful members of their ethnic group, or who typify personality traits like courage or self-sacrifice that they aspire to or identify with. Students may

[5] See the ongoing *Foxfire* series, ed. Eliot Wigginton and others (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Anchor Books; New York: Dutton). For the account of how the projects developed and how they work, see Eliot Wigginton, *Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience* (Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1986).

investigate someone to find out how he got to be the way he is. What experiences has he had? What does *he* think is his most significant achievement? Questions for interviewing come from things the biographer has reasons to want to know.

If the subject is unavailable for interview, or if the investigator wants to supplement interviews with him with other information, he can write to the subject or interview people who know him. The biographer then decides on one event or phase that would make a good true story about the chosen person and writes it up. He can submit a draft of this account to the subject for reaction and suggestions before rewriting it as a newspaper feature story, part of a project in career selection, a case study, and so on.

It's best to hold off biography that depends on documents until a student is well versed in firsthand investigation of a living person. Paraphrasing encyclopedias and other reference works or secondary sources does not constitute real investigation or composition. Students will make better use of these in writing if they work their way up to them through firsthand sources and *primary* documents. If, for example, students choose a relative or ancestor to write about, old photographs, letters, certificates, diaries, and other documents might be available as sources for the account. If they choose an important but remote figure, they can draw on newspaper accounts, archives, letters, diaries, autobiography, and memoir. Experienced investigators can write biographies of dead or unavailable persons based largely on documents, but the more they draw on third-person sources that did what they are doing, the closer they get to paraphrasing and plagiarizing. See page 388 for ways to shape this kind of material into a profile.

## ■ CHRONICLE

Whereas biography focuses on an individual, chronicle focuses on a group. History certainly is about groups also but larger, more remote groups than we have in mind here, encompassing much more time and space, like whole regions, nations, or cultures. Students might decide to tell what an athletic team, a club, a gang, or a neighborhood anti-crime organization did that is now over. Completed action makes it a story. If the group still exists, like an organization, it might be interesting to tell its history up to now—how it got started and developed, its vicissitudes. In either case, an investigator interviews members for their account of what happened and puts it together with what he learns from interviewing persons outside of the group who might have a different perception of what the group has done.

If the investigator is a member of the group, he can enjoy the chorus role in addition and tell what happened as an insider. Perhaps the organization kept minutes or other records that might be consulted. If the group's action received public attention, other documents like newspaper files, police records, county and municipal records, and transcripts might provide more information. If students want to tell the story of some group they have only heard or read about, they have to be experienced enough working from documents to role-play historians without simply copying from them.

### PARALLEL READING

Besides their value as portraits of people to whom youngsters may be drawn for important psychological reasons, biographies usually contain much valuable factual information included to illumine the careers or the circumstances in which

the main figures are involved. This way of acquiring geographical or scientific or political knowledge may be much easier for many students than reading expository articles on these subjects. At the same time it may encourage these students to turn next to just such nonnarrative articles.

Short complete biographies of significant figures are frequently written for a juvenile audience or for adult magazines, but collections for adults are rather rare. Two appealing books containing them are Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* and John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage.* Virginia Woolf wrote vitas of Mary Wollstonecraft and other important feminine figures, collected in *The Common Reader.*

An example of a suspenseful chronicle is Bruce Bliven's *The Story of D Day. Time of Torment: Nineteen Sixty-one to Nineteen Sixty-seven* by I.F.Stone and *My Lai Massacre and Its Coverup: Beyond the Reach of Law?* by Joseph Goldstein et alia are two chronicles of the sixties that raise serious moral issues. Berton Roueche's *Eleven Blue Men* and his narratives of medical detectives make absorbing reading and are examples of chronicles that are cases. Close-ups of historical moments can be found in periodicals such as *American Heritage* and *Journal of Negro History.*

Biography and chronicle provide students a more personal and concrete approach to the figures and events of history, which textbooks and other synoptic works notoriously overcondense. Chronicle typically covers much of what is generally called history except that the degree of abstraction is not as great because it breaks history into smaller units and stays closer to primary sources. It may often happen that some students will become interested in a whole period or country or phase of history as a result of reading a couple of biographies or a chronicle from it. If students also read some of the letters, diaries, autobiographies, and memoirs from which biographies and chronicles are written, then when they do read the more synoptic kind of history, they may better understand the process by which it in turn was distilled, and become more sophisticated about the necessary biases and emphases and omissions inherent in the selectivity of history.

## ■ THE CASE

A case study is a true story about an individual or group that *represents* the experiences of other individuals or groups. Although many biographies and chronicles may be *understood* in this way, case histories are explicitly written to typify their subjects' stories. So they bridge considerably from narrative into essay. A case tends to treat an unknown person whose situation or traits have applicability to others, whereas published biography is generally about a person who's already famous or interesting to the public.

Cases constitute an important kind of writing that's practiced extensively in our society. A social worker periodically visits a family on relief and writes a report, based on notes, of the family's changing conditions. A psychotherapist writes up notes of interviews with a patient and produces a clinical case study. An educator writes an account of the mental growth of a child under certain conditions. And schools of law and business have for some time relied on case reading as a way of plunging their students into actual situations such as they will encounter professionally. "Getting down to cases" is looking at real instances that characterize common problems or issues. An account of the course of a lawsuit, a

commercial negotiation, a piece of legislation, or a labor-management dispute serves as a window on certain sorts of practical problems that the account embodies. When used for discussion and exercise in decision-making, the case is often presented incompletely, the conclusion being withheld until the trainees have had a chance to resolve the problem themselves.

Students might create a case by any combination of investigative techniques discussed for reportage, biography, and chronicle—on-site visits, interviews, and documents (see "Composites of Information Gathering" on page 388). A simple way to create a case is to keep a specialized journal of visits and interviews and to summarize it later so as to make clear in what way the events are generalizable to other people or situations. The use of documents might be to frame the research with past background or general context such as the state of knowledge in the area which the case can illumine. Depending on whether firsthand or secondhand sources dominate, and on how significant a role the author played in events, a case may be written in either first person or third person. It focuses, at any rate, on the other, not the author.

## PARALLEL READING

Many feature articles in magazines and newspapers are brief cases. The *New Yorker* is an excellent source, as it is for all kinds of reportage and research. In addition, there are many case books in various fields that include accounts for laypeople that are not too mature or technical for adolescents. Classroom collections of biography should include some case histories to provide a model for student composition. Robert Coles's *Children in Crisis* and others in his crisis series, like Robert Lindner's *The Fifty Minute Hour* about psychiatric patients, provide highly readable examples of cases. Many short stories—Willa Cather's "Paul's Case" and Conrad Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," for example—are fictional equivalents of the personal case. As noted before, juxtaposition of real and invented accounts reveals the special qualities of each mode of reporting on human experience.

One of our articles of faith—founded, we believe, on some real evidence—is that older adolescents are capable of doing on a smaller scale what adult practitioners of a career do. The point of role-playing the professional is not only to learn how to be a lawyer, social worker, scientist, or business person but to be able to understand and care about what those people are doing. More basically, the purpose is to understand how it is we know what we think we know. Even if his future job will not require case-writing or other written investigation, a student should learn from direct experience how the information of his world is created. In fact, the principal justification of any writing program is not so much to prepare students for careers as it is to develop their thought and understanding.