Memoir Writing Circles

SCLA – “Libraries Make it Happen”

October 12, 2017

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Purpose of Memoir Writing Circles:

* Socializing and sharing
* Collecting stories for family, friends or the community
* Empowering writing and storytelling skills
* Providing opportunities for individual growth through introspection
* Helping authors find audiences for their stories

Basic Program Needs:

* Facilitator who enjoys writing and listening to stories
* Meeting space
* 1 ½ -2 hours of meeting time
* Paper for
  + Writing prompts
  + Feedback forms
* Kleenex (in the room, but discreet, just in case there are tears)

Format:

* Greet group, invite new writers to briefly share writing interests
* Pass out prompt and read aloud
* Write for 20 minutes
* Share what you write (off topic is OK, imperfect is OK, passing is OK)
* Give feedback to reader verbally and on feedback forms

Tips:

* Facilitators participate and set the tone for trust and respect.
* Keep the prompt short and open-ended.
* The goal is to get as many details down in those 20 minutes. Organization is up to the writer (sentences, bullet points, mind maps, poems, etc.).
* Remember it’s OK to be imperfect, and it’s OK to pass if you don’t feel like sharing.
* Allow time to share polished work in another session.
* Groups of 6-10 are best – larger groups can break up for sharing time.
* Retired teachers can help with group facilitation and feedback.

Creating Simple Prompts:

* 20 things about…
* Idea or Situation + Who, What, When, Where, Why, How, and So What?
* Quote and idea + Who, What, When, Where, Why, How, and So What?

Resources for Prompt Ideas:

* Daily life – news stories, conversations, family characters, holidays, travel, food, jobs, hobbies, pets, school memories, love, marriage, kids, pet peeves, accomplishments, challenges, etc.
* *642 Things to Write About Me* by the San Francisco Writer’s Grotto, Chronicle Books, 2015.
* www.realsimple.com/static/pdfs/questions.pdf
* storycorps.org/participate/great-questions/
* www.thisamericanlife.org
* Passages from compelling memoirs or vivid fiction (doubles as readers advisory)
* Old family pictures
* Ideas of group members

*Sample feedback form:*

Name of Reader: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Critique by: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What’s good:

Tell me more:

1.

2.

3.

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Sample Prompt 1: First Jobs

20 things you remember about your first job. Include sensory details (see, hear, smell, touch, taste):

1. 11.
2. 12.
3. 13.
4. 14.
5. 15.
6. 16.
7. 17.
8. 18.
9. 19.
10. 20.

Take these details and create a story:

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Sample Prompt 2: First Jobs

We all have to start our working life somewhere. First jobs can be easy or difficult, boring or fun, helpful to our future or telling of the things we don’t want to do. Today, write about a memorable first job:

* Who was your employer?
* What was the job? Use your senses to describe it (see, hear, smell, touch, taste).
* How old were you?
* Where was the job?
* How did you get the job?
* Give an anecdote of something serious, funny or important that happened on the job.
* Why is this job memorable to you? What did you learn or take away from it?