**English 11 – Memoir Assignment**

memoir: a piece of autobiographical writing, usually shorter than a comprehensive autobiography. The memoirist tries to capture certain highlights or meaningful moments in his or her past, often including a contemplation of the meaning of that event at the time of writing.

Your memoir must:

* identify and explore a moment when you learned something significant about yourself and the world around you.
* include three separate but connected anecdotes that - in combination – tell a story about this moment of epiphany.
* be five to seven pages long (typed, double-spaced, one inch margins, 12 pt. font).

Timeline:

October 5: brainstorm, select a central idea, and plan

**Due at the start of class on Wednesday, October 12 – completed memoir draft in shared folder – title of file should be “Last Name – Memoir Draft”**

Wednesday, October 12: peer editing

**Monday, October 17 - Due at 2:30 PM on turnitin.com: your completed memoir (100 points)**

**Guidelines/Tips/Grading Criteria:**

* have a clear and consistent voice
* tell a good story using fictional techniques including a well established setting, careful plot development, vivid imagery, compelling conflict, engaging dialogue, and thoughtfully drawn characters
* do more showing than telling
* use vivid descriptions including specific details
* carefully develop at least one character in addition to your own character
* pay careful attention to word choice and vary your sentence structure
* use active verbs and carefully selected adjectives
* make use of sensory details
* convey an emotional truth

**Brainstorming on a theme**

Given that your task is to write about a moment where you learned something important about yourself and the word around you, your first challenge is to identify what you learned and when and how this learning took place.

Some ideas to get you started (freewrite for five minutes on each of these topics until you think you have landed on your idea:

* a time your beliefs were challenged
* a time you made a shocking discovery
* a time you saw the world with new eyes
* a person who changed the way you saw the world

Once you have a general idea of your topic, begin to map out your memoir. A useful – but not mandatory – template (adapted from the Moth storytelling guide) is:

**World as it was**: Tell a specific story about your life before this moment took place. What do we need to know about you as a character? Introduce yourself through this first anecdote.

**And then one day…:** What happened to set this story in motion? What did you want or want to avoid?

**Raising the stakes:** Why was this important to you? What did you have to win or lose?

**Moment of change:** What choice did you have to make – or what happened that changed how you see things?

**World as it is now:** How are you different at the end of the story than how you were at the beginning of the story?

As you make your way through this map, remember that you need to tell three specific stories along the way. Decide how, where, and why you will include your carefully selected and illustrated anecdotes.

As you write, think about what made the different memoirs that we read effective. Your memoir cannot and should not do everything that all three of those authors did, but you should think about what will make your memoir distinctive. Will you focus on physical description, like McPhee did? Will you include humorous dialogue, like Baker did? Will you address a broad social issue, like Alexie did? What sort of story do you want to tell, and what are the strategies that you will use to achieve that effect?