

In this chapter, we ask you to write about a remembered event that will engage you and that has significance for you. From reading and analyzing the selections in the Guide to Reading that follows, you will learn how to make your own story interesting, even exciting, to read. The Guide to Writing later in the chapter will support you as you compose your remembered event essay, showing you ways to use the basic features of the genre to tell your story vividly and dramatically, entertaining readers but also giving them insight into the event's significance—its meaning and importance—in your life.

PRACTICING THE GENRE

Telling a Story

The success of remembered event writing depends on how well the story is told. Some memorable events are inherently dramatic, but most are not. The challenge is to make the story entertaining and meaningful for readers. The most effective autobiographical stories make readers care about the storyteller and curious to know what happened. To practice creating an engaging story based on a memorable event in your life, get together with two or three other students and follow these guidelines:

Part 1. Choose a memorable event that you feel comfortable describing to this group. Be sure you can tell your story in just a few minutes. Take five minutes to sketch out a plan about what makes the event memorable (for example, a conflict with someone else or with yourself, the strong or mixed feelings it evokes, the cultural attitudes it reflects). What will be the turning point, or climax, of the story, and how will you build up to it? Then take turns telling your stories.

Part 2. After telling your stories, discuss what you learned about the genre:

- **What did you learn about the genre from others' stories?** To think about purpose for audience in the genre of autobiography, tell each other what struck you most on hearing each other's stories. For example, identify something in the story that was moving, suspenseful, edgy, or funny. What in the story, if anything, helped you identify or sympathize with the storyteller? What do you think the point or significance of the story is—its other words, what makes the event so memorable?
- **What did you learn about the genre from constructing your own autobiographical story?** With the others in your group, compare your thoughts on what was easiest and hardest about telling the story, for example, choosing an event, portraying the conflict in making the story dramatic, selecting what to put in and leave out, or letting the story speak for itself without explaining.

GUIDE TO READING

Analyzing Remembered Event Essays

As you read the selections in this chapter, you will see how different authors craft stories about an important event in their lives. Analyzing how these writers tell a dramatic, well-focused story; use vivid, specific description to enliven their writing; and choose the details and words that enable them to convey their perspective on the event will help you see how you can employ these same techniques when writing your own autobiographical story.

Determine the writer's purpose and audience.

Many people write about important events in their lives to archive their memories and to learn something about themselves. Keep in mind, however, that unless you are writing in your diary, remembered event writing is a public genre meant to be read by others. So it is important to think about self-presentation as well as self-discovery.

Memorable events are by definition full of potential meaning, and insightful readers often see larger themes or deeper implications—what we call **significance**—beyond those the writer consciously intends to communicate or even acknowledges. This richness of meaning makes autobiographical writing fascinating to read and to write. When reading the selections about remembered events that follow, ask yourself the following questions about the writer's purpose and audience:

- What seems to be the writer's main *purpose*—for example, to understand what happened and why, perhaps to confront unconscious and possibly uncomplimentary motives, to relieve an intense experience, perhaps to work through complex and ambivalent feelings; to win over readers, perhaps to justify or rationalize choices made, actions taken, or words used; to reflect on cultural attitudes at the time the event occurred, perhaps in contrast to current ways of thinking?
- What does the author assume about the *audience*—for example, that readers will have had similar experiences and therefore appreciate what the writer went through and not judge the writer too harshly; that they will see the writer as innocent, well meaning, a victim, or something else; that readers will laugh with and not at the writer, seeing the writer's failings as amusing foibles and not serious shortcomings; that readers will reflect on the cultural context in which the event occurred and how it influenced the writer?

Assess the genre's basic features.

Basic Features
A Well-Told Story
Vivid Description
Significance

As you read remembered event essays in this chapter, you will see how different authors incorporate the basic features of the genre. The examples that follow are taken from the reading selections that appear later in this Guide to Reading.

A WELL-TOLD STORY

Read first to enjoy the story. The best autobiographical stories are first and foremost a pleasure to read.