

## EXPRESSIONS IN WRITING

Dear Creative Writers,

One of the many pieces of writing you will work on this fall semester is a portion of your autobiography. The concept of the autobiography has evolved in contemporary literature to include the memoir and the personal essay. There are hazy lines between the genres, if they differ at all. A newer addition to them all is the fictionalized autobiography. Some examples of each would perhaps assist you in defining what you want your own writing to be and do. I encourage you to explore the many examples and forms of autobiographical work available.

To this end, you will be responsible for reading **two** of following titles:

*The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien

*A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* by Michael Dorris

*The Rapture of Canaan* by Sheri Reynolds

*My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult

*\*The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingslover

*The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini

*The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd

*Life of Pi* by Yann Martel

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon

*The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold

*Cold Sassy Tree* by Olive Ann Burns

*The Prince of Tides* by Pat Conroy

**\*NOTE:** If you are an English AP student taking Expressions in Writing as an elective, you may not choose *The Poisonwood Bible* as one of your summer reading selections.

All are examples of fictional autobiography. Though you may choose to read all twelve (I highly recommend this), you are **required to read two**. I offer a brief description of each novel to assist you in your selection (please see attached).

### **THE ASSIGNMENT:**

- **Read** two (or more) of the novels. Please complete the reading assignment before you write a draft of your autobiography. Reading the fictional autobiographies may give you some thoughts on how to approach your own draft.
  - For the books you read, answer the following questions. Please type your answers and bring them to class on September 2<sup>nd</sup>.

1. Write one word from the work ( the word must appear in the novel) which sums up the feeling of the entire work. For example, if you were to read *Macbeth* you might choose the word “blood”. Briefly explain why you feel this word is the best choice.
2. Copy, word for word, a passage from the work, which made the deepest impression on you. Please indicate the page number for the passage. Obviously, you will have to limit the length. The passage may be dialogue, straight prose, or a combination of both.
3. Tell in what ways this passage made an impression on you.
4. What one event in the work stands out most in your mind? Explain why this event stayed with you.
5. What is the author’s view of life? (Where is the author coming from?) Think in terms of the author’s approach to plot/conflict, character development, choice of setting and point of view, as well as the way the author led you to an understanding of theme(s). A writer often reveals his/her basic life philosophies through his/her work.

➤ **Write** a piece of your autobiography (3-4 pages) and email a copy no later than August 15<sup>th</sup> to the following address: [mrivara@lvhs.org](mailto:mrivara@lvhs.org). I will also expect you to bring a printed copy of your autobiography as well as the answers to the five questions to our first class on September 2<sup>nd</sup>. If you do not have access to email, you may mail a copy to me at home (my address is below). The August 15<sup>th</sup> deadline still applies when submitting via regular post.

Taste dictates the style of writing you prefer in the retelling of a life story whether you are reading someone else’s story or writing your own. Now, for those of you who want a more definitive written assignment, here are some ideas:

- ◆ Recalling childhood – a story that reconnects you to an early fear, memory, joy, friend, house, room, or object from the past
- ◆ A photographic reconnection with your family – a series of pictures or a single picture with **narrative** that serves as a springboard into the context of your childhood
- ◆ A loss of innocence experience, one that you feel shaped the person you are in some way
- ◆ A forecast of your own future – predict where you will be along with those around you
- ◆ A view of old age – a story about a grandparent, about illness, about a model in your own life, about old age as a generic condition
- ◆ A retelling of your own life using Shields’s chapter heading(s) or a retelling using your own unique chapter heading(s).
- ◆ A vignette from your own imagination or family treasure trove of “stories” that retrieves something special for you or something feared, or something cherished
- ◆ An epistolary segment that you create, a series of episodes, letters home from college, letters from graduate school, from Europe, from your best friend, a relative, someone you love, etc. Letters or diaries are wonderful translators of feelings and experiences

I will expect to receive the email (or mailed copy) of your autobiographical drafts no later than August 15<sup>th</sup>. I also ask that you bring a copy of your autobiographical draft on the first day of school along with the answers to the five questions on the novels you read. Your autobiographical draft is just that, a work in progress. However, I do expect some development and I expect the draft to be typed. I will make comments on these pieces and return them for further revision. This piece of writing will give us a place to start in the writing workshop.

During the first week of school you will be given an assignment which relates directly to the novels you chose to read over the summer. The reading will form a basis for discussions we will have during the year.

It is always nice to own your own copy of a book so that you can make notes in the book as you read. If this is not possible, copies of the books are available at local libraries. You may e-mail me at [mrivara@lvhs.org](mailto:mrivara@lvhs.org) if you have any burning questions. Keep in mind, it is summer, and I don't check e-mail everyday. Be patient for responses.

Have a wonderful summer. I look forward to writing, reading, and working with you this coming year.

Enjoy Your Summer!  
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### ***The Things They Carried***

“*The Things They Carried* has become an unparalleled Vietnam testament, a classic work of American literature, and a profound study of men at war that illuminates the capacity, and the limits, of the human heart and soul.”

### ***A Yellow Raft in Blue Water***

“...this book is about understanding. The characters each go through life's journey to understand.... This book is uniquely formatted, going backward in time, retelling the same story from each character's point of view. You learn each character's past, the way they lived their lives and the way others saw them live it. 'I never grew up, but I got old. I'm a woman who's lived for fifty-seven years and worn resentment like a medicine charm for forty. It hung heavier on my neck after each brief rest I took' (207). The language used in this book is beautiful, the story is touching, and the characters are amazing.”

### ***The Rapture of Canaan***

“...a book about miracles and in writing it, Reynolds has performed something of a miracle herself. Although the church’s beliefs and practices may seem extreme...its members are complex and profoundly sympathetic as they wrestle with the contradictions of Fire and Brimstone’s theology, the temptations of the outside world, and the frailties of the human heart.”

### ***My Sister’s Keeper***

“Anna was genetically engineered to be a perfect match for her cancer-ridden older sister. Since birth, the 13-year-old has donated platelets, blood...bone marrow as part of her family’s struggle to lengthen Kate’s life. Anna is now being considered as a kidney donor in a last-ditch attempt to save her 16-year-old sister. As this compelling story opens, Anna has hired a lawyer to represent her in a medical emancipation suit to allow her to have control over her own body. Picoult skillfully relates the ensuing drama from the points of view of the parents, Anna, the lawyer, and others involved in the case. The novel is thought-provoking.”

### ***The Poisonwood Bible***

“...when Barbara Kingslover sends missionary Nathan Price along with his wife and four daughters off to Africa, you can be sure that salvation is the one thing they’re not likely to find. The year is 1959 and the place is the Belgian Congo. In addition to poisonous snakes, dangerous animals, and the hostility of the villagers to Nathan’s fiery take-no-prisoners brand of Christianity, there are also rebels in the jungle and the threat of war in the air.”

### ***The Kite Runner***

“...this is the story of Amir, the privileged son of a wealthy businessman in Kabul, and Hassan, the son of Amir’s father’s servant. As children in the relatively stable Afghanistan of the early 1970’s, the boys are inseparable. They spend idyllic days running kites and telling stories of mystical places and powerful warriors until an unspeakable event changes the nature of their relationship forever, and eventually cements their bond in ways neither boy could have ever expected... At a time when Afghanistan has been thrust into the forefront of America’s collective consciousness, Hosseini offers an honest, sometimes tragic, sometimes funny, but always heartfelt view of a fascinating land.”

### ***The Secret Life of Bees***

“Set in South Carolina in 1964, this novel tells the story of Lily Owens, whose life has been shaped around the blurred memory of the afternoon her mother was killed. When Lily’s fierce-hearted black “stand-in mother” insults three of the deepest racists in town, Lily decides to spring them both free. They escape to a town that

holds the secret to her mother's past.... This is a remarkable novel about divine female power, a story that women will share and pass on to their daughters for years to come."

### ***Life of Pi***

"When Pi Patel is sixteen, his family and their zoo animals (his father is a zookeeper) emigrate from India to North America aboard a Japanese cargo ship. Alas, the ship sinks – and Pi finds himself in a lifeboat, his only companions a hyena, an orangutan, a wounded zebra, and a 450-pound Bengal tiger..."

### ***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time***

"Christopher John Francis Boone knows all the countries of the world and their capitals and every prime number up to 7,057. He relates well to animals but has no understanding of human emotions. He cannot stand to be touched. And he detests the color yellow.

This improbable story of Christopher's quest to investigate the suspicious death of a neighborhood dog makes for one of the most captivating, unusual, and widely heralded novels in recent years."

### ***The Lovely Bones***

"Sebold's novel is a small but far from minor miracle. The author has taken a grim, media-exploited subject and fashioned from it a story that is both tragic and full of light and grace. This novel is a moving exploration of loss and mourning that ultimately puts its faith in the living and that is made even more powerful by a cast of convincing characters."

### ***Cold Sassy Tree***

"This small town in Georgia is turned upside-down by the quick marriage between the general store manager and a Yankee woman half his age. His grandson, the young Will Tweedy tells this story about changing times in his hometown, daring to wonder about the events the adults want to keep under wraps. Will grows up as he witnesses his grandfather's happiness and the town's modernization."

### ***Prince of Tides***

"The novel is framed by a series of flashbacks. The story actually takes place in two separate settings and two different eras. The novel tells the story of the narrator's (Tom Wingo) struggle to overcome the psychological damage inflicted by his dysfunctional childhood in South Carolina.