

Writing About Ourselves and Others

A Proposal for a 2019 DTI Seminar

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In 2017 I had the pleasure of leading a DTI seminar on *The Fourth Genre*. In that course we explored the various forms that Creative Nonfiction can take: memoirs, profiles, reviews, reports, interviews, commentaries, travel writing, science writing, and the like. For 2019 I would like to propose a seminar in which we would drill down on one particular type of nonfiction: *writing about people*, both ourselves and others.

Students are asked to write about themselves from their first to last years in school—from all-about-me collages in the early grades, to personal narratives in the middle years, and finally to essays for college applications. They are also often asked to talk with and write about the people around them: family, friends, neighbors, people with jobs or skills they find interesting. We will begin our work in this seminar by reading a series of brief person-centered pieces by several accomplished, contemporary authors. Then, after identifying the key features of the memoir, interview, and profile, participants will compose curriculum units in which they guide students in writing about themselves and/or others. I also hope to invite several participants from the 2017 Creative Nonfiction seminar to visit and talk about similar units they developed.

In discussing writing about the self, we will look at pieces based not only on *memory* but *documents* (journals, news articles, interviews, photos, etc.). In discussing writing about others, we will distinguish between the profile, a story *about* another person, and the Q&A interview, or a conversation *with* someone else. We'll also consider what can happen when an interview is presented as an audio podcast rather than being written on the page. And we will look at the role of the visual in personal writing—at the photo and graphic essay.

My hope is that this seminar will offer participants a chance to reimagine, revise, and re-energize that perhaps all too familiar moment in the curriculum when students are asked to write a personal narrative or interview.