

English 475A/675A American Autobiography

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Section /Meeting place and time

Instructor:

Office:)

Phone:

email:

Office conferences:

* * *

Semester & Year

Course description: *Reading life stories with attention to gender, race, and class. History, characteristics, and problems of the genre. Prereq(s): ENG 303, junior standing.*

This course, designed for English majors, minors, and graduate students, addresses issues that have special significance to the genres of autobiographical writing (or life narrative): truth and truth-telling, collaboration and representation of the other, authenticity and ownership, ethical uses of sensitive material, memory and its relation to autobiographical truth, the autobiographical narrator, identity and self-representation, life narrative as testimony.

Although this is *not* a course in memoir-writing, the assignments will provide you an opportunity to experience autobiographical writing from the *inside* (with a personal narrative) as well as from *outside* (with critical analyses and a book review). Our texts include primarily literary memoirs, but we will also look at American autobiographical writing done for other purposes, such as historical or ethnographic documentation, celebrity account, spiritual exploration, political impact, and exploration of physical and social aspects of identity.

I assume you already have at least some passing familiarity with the autobiographies of Benjamin Franklin and Frederick Douglass (I have ordered *Classical American Autobiographies* as an optional reference), so although we will refer to those early classics in our discussions, we will begin our reading with an early twentieth century “as-told-to” and two important works of the mid-twentieth-century: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *The Woman Warrior*. Then we will branch out into some more recent works that will spark our discussion of genre issues and of the questions of identity and belonging that American autobiographical writing addresses so frequently and poignantly.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students successfully completing English 475A will demonstrate the following knowledge and skills in their oral discussion and writing:

1. List and discuss key artistic and social issues that arise in autobiographical writing and apply them to specific written works. (CO3)
2. Develop and articulate (orally and in writing) strategies for reading, interpreting, and critiquing memoirists' choices of materials and literary techniques. (CO3)
3. Place American autobiographical writing in historical context, evaluating trends and identifying issues of equity in the representation of gender, race and class in life writing. (CO10)
4. Describe the perceptions, viewpoints, and life experiences of marginalized groups within the United States, as articulated in the life writing of individuals in those groups. (CO10)
5. Identify and discuss ethical questions relevant to the genre of life writing and to memoirists' choices, including the ethics of truth-telling, collaboration and representation. (CO12)
6. Write a successful autobiographical essay, collaborative memoir, and critical interpretation, as measured by a course rubric. (CO1)

In addition to the above outcomes, students successfully completing English 675A

7. Demonstrate, through an annotated bibliography and class presentation, awareness of theories and research relevant to the study of autobiographical genres, and particularly to recurring questions about truth, memory, identity, and representation.

Core Curriculum Objectives

This course satisfies the following core objective:

CO10: Diversity & Equity. Students will develop a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate attentiveness to and analysis of diversity and equity.

This course develops the following core objectives:

CO1: Effective Composition & Communication.

CO3: Critical Analysis & Use of Information.

CO12: Ethics.

Required texts:

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*. Mariner, 2007.
Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior* (1976). Vintage, 1989.
Malcolm X & Alex Haley. *Autobiography* (1964). Ballantine, 1987.
Santos, John Phillip. *Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation*. Penguin, 2000
Dillard, Annie, & Cort Conley, eds. *Modern American Memoirs*. Harper, 1996.
Smith, Sidonie, & Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography*. 2nd ed. U Minnesota P, 2010.
[also available electronically through UNR libraries]
Another book-length memoir selected by the class

Texts available in the bookstore (optional) and on reserve:

Andrews, William L. *Classic American Autobiographies*. Signet, 2003 (reissue).
Eakin, Paul John, ed. *The Ethics of Life Writing*. Cornell, 2004.

(Other texts containing assigned or recommended critical readings are also on reserve; consult library listing under this course number; online readings will be linked to WebCampus.)

Course Requirements and Grading: English 475A

- Read as assigned for each class and attend and participate knowledgeably in class discussions. *100 points*
- Respond in writing on the course WebCampus site to a question or assignment provided by me or to a relevant issue or question raised by a member of the class. (This will vary from week to week.) Minimum length—one screen. (9 responses + 1 free ride @ 15 points each). *150 points total*
- Tests: Twice during the term, I will give you “take-home” test questions. You will post your answers to me a week later. *200 points total*
- Draft and revise three 5-page papers: 1) a memoir essay; 2) a collaborative auto/biographical essay, along with a reflection on the practical and ethical issues that arose during the process; 3) a review of an autobiography that both evaluates the text and connects it to the critical and ethical conversations in our class and readings. *300 points total*
- Draft and revise a 7-8-page essay discussing one or two works read for class, along with at least two published, peer-reviewed critical sources, based on an assignment I will give you. *250 points*

Course Requirements and Grading: English 675A

- Read as assigned for each class and attend and participate knowledgeably in class discussions. *100 points*

- Respond in writing on the course WebCampus site to a question or assignment provided by me or to a relevant issue or question raised by a member of the class. (This will vary from week to week.) Minimum length—one screen. (9 responses + 1 free ride @ 15 points each). *150 points total*
- Draft and revise two 5-page papers: 1) a memoir essay; 2) a collaborative auto/biographical essay and reflection. See above. *200 points total*
- Produce a 10-item annotated bibliography that summarizes and evaluates primary and secondary works read for class. At least two items must be critical works, and at least two must be works that are not on the class reading list. *250 points*
- Draft and revise a critical essay based on your bibliography; discuss your topic with me ahead of time. *200 points*
- Prepare an informal class presentation focused on one of the works or issues introduced in class. This should be a 15-minute presentation followed by class discussion. *100 points*

Points and Letters: You can check your grade at any time by dividing the points you've earned by the "points-available-so-far" in the course. Points at the end of the course will total 1000. 92%-100%=A; 90-91%=A-; 87-89%=B+; 82-86%=B; 80-81%=B-; 77-79%=C+; 72-76%=C; 70-71%=C-; 60-69%=D (I see no point in D+ and D- in a course for majors); Below 60%=F.

Procedure for WebCampus responses:

You may extend the assigned reading (with additional examples or connections), take issue with it, ask questions of it, reflect on its implications, compare with another text, or have a dialogue with the author. You may respond to a question or comment posted by any of us.

I would like us all to have a chance to read the WebCampus postings while they are still relevant to the work we are discussing in class. So, in order to receive credit, your *required* weekly posting must be made by **Saturday night** at the end of that week. Also, please feel free to (and please *do*) respond to class members' comments online at ANY time. Ten postings are listed on the schedule below, but you may skip *one week's* web response with no effect on your grade.

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Tentative Schedule of Reading and Writing Assignments

Go to "Weekly Assignments" on the course WebCampus site for full information on the week's assignments, along with links to "handouts" and other texts.

Week 1	INTRODUCTION. READING AUTOBIOGRAPHY (SLO 1, 2)
Day 1	Introduction

- Day 2 **Modern American Memoirs:**
Tobias Wolff (p. 193), Geoffrey Wolff (p. 288)
 Also read: "Life Narrative: Definitions and Distinctions," 1-14 in *Reading Autobiography*.
- Week 2** **AUTOBIOGRAPHY, CELEBRITY & CONTROVERSY (SLO 3, 4)**
 Day 3 ***The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (ix-110—Ch. Intro-6)**
Modern American Memoirs: Gornick (p. 91), Hurston (p. 390)
 Begin draft of your autobiographical essay.
 Web response: What questions do you have, as a writer and as a reader, about the key issues in the genre of autobiographical writing?
- Day 4 ***The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (111-270—Ch. 7-14)**
Modern American Memoirs: Wright (p. 178); Ozick (p.108)
- Week 3** **THE ETHICS OF COLLABORATION (SLO 5, 6)**
 Day 5 ***The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (271-389—Ch. 15-19)**
 Read "Life Narrative in Historical Perspective," pp. 103-125 in *Reading Autobiography*.
 Provide a complete draft of your autobiographical essay (paper #1) to your writing group.
- Day 6 **Workshop**
 Collaborative autobiography assignment, step 1
 Web response: How did Malcolm X and Haley use the genre of autobiography to raise issues of social justice, and how effective do you think their strategies were?
- Week 4** **BE(COMING) AMERICAN: POSTMODERN BICULTURAL MEMOIR(SLO 2, 3, 4)**
 Day 7 ***The Woman Warrior***
 "Autobiographical Subjects," pp. 15-48 in *Reading Autobiography*
Revised autobiographical essay due.
 Collaborative assignment, step 2 (in class).
- Day 8 ***The Woman Warrior***
 Web response: Choose a key image or theme (from those listed in class) and discuss how Kingston uses it to explore the significance of (her) gender in Chinese and U.S. culture.
- Week 5** **THE ETHICS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION (SLO 5, 6)**
 Day 9 ***The Woman Warrior***
 Collaborative assignment, step 3

- Day 10 **Topic: Autobiography reviews and ethics**
Intro. (Eakin) & Chapter 5 (Mills) in *The Ethics of Life Writing* [see link]
Web response: Which ethical issues, discussed by Eakin and others, did you encounter in your collaborative assignment, and how did you attempt to resolve them?
- Week 6**
Day 11 **AUTOBIOGRAPHY ON THE BORDER: Geography & Culture (SLO 3, 4)**
Modern American Memoirs: Lopez (372), Kittredge (355), Stegner (24)
Also read "Tool Kit," pp. 235-51 in *Reading Autobiography*
Collaborative memoir assignment due (also see web response assignment below)
- Day 12 ***Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation***
English 475A Take-home exam distributed
Web response: How does Santos's bicultural/binational representation of place compare to the use of geographical place in Stegner or Kittredge?
- Week 7**
Day 13 **CULTURAL MEDIATION OF MEMOIR (1, 2, 4)**
Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation
"Autobiographical Acts," pp. 49-82 in *Reading Autobiography*
- Day 14 ***Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation***
English 475A Exam answers must be posted by 00:00 today.
English 675A: One sample annotated bibliography entry due today.
- Week 8**
Day 15 **HISTORY AND AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY (SLO 3, 5)**
Read excerpts from Franklin, Douglass, Jacobs, Jordan (WebCampus)
Web response 7: How do Douglass and/or Jordan use Franklin's "classic" Enlightenment autobiography form to convey their own positions regarding social equity and personal ethics?
- Day 16 ***Modern American Memoirs: Baker (49); Moody (321); Wideman (407)***
English 475A: Critical essays assigned
English 675A: schedule topic meeting with me.
- Week 9**
Day 17 **THE MEMOIR BOOM (SLO 1, 5)**
Read "In the Wake of the Memoir Boom," pp. 127-165 in *Reading Autobiography*.
- Day 18 ***Begin to read the memoir of your choice***
Web response: What ethical and practical issues does the market for, and marketing of, popular memoir raise for writers and/or readers? What do you feel is your responsibility as a reader OR writer of memoir?
Critical essay drafts due to groups.

Week 10	POPULAR MEMOIR AND ISSUES OF TRUTH-TELLING (SLO 5, 6)
Day 19	<i>Workshop</i>
Day 20	<i>Continue reading the memoir of your choice</i> Web response: comment on the content of your chosen text (no spoilers!) and connect it with one of the artistic, social, or ethical issues we have discussed so far in class.
Week 11	APPLYING READING & WRITING STRATEGIES (SLO 1, 6)
Day 21	Writing and researching reviews of autobiographical writing English 475A: Critical essays due; 675A: <i>drafts</i> of 5 entries & critical essay
Day 22	Reviews assigned. Sample reviews.
Week 12	GRAPHIC MEMOIR (SLO 1, 2, 6)
Day 23	<i>Fun Home</i> Also read “Visual-Verbal Contexts,” pp. 167-191 in <i>Reading Autobiography</i>
Day 24	<i>Fun Home</i> Drafts of review essays due to writing groups
Week 13	NEW TRENDS IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL “WRITING” (SLO 1, 2)
Day 25	<i>Workshop</i> Web Response: What impact do you think new media (graphic memoir, Facebook, film, etc.) are having—or will have—on autobiographical representation?
Day 26	<i>Fun Home</i> English 675A: annotated bibliographies due
Week 14	REVISIONS & PRESENTATIONS (SLO 6)
Day 27	English 475: revised review essays due
Day 28	Presentations; discussions of reviews Take-home exam distributed
Week 15	PRESENTATIONS AND FINAL EXAMINATION
Day 29	Presentations
Day 30	English 475A Exam answers must be posted by 00:00 today.

Final revisions of English 675A papers due:

Further information

If you have a disability and will be requiring assistance, please contact me or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building Suite 100) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. "Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses" constitutes academic dishonesty according to this university's code. Penalties include failure in the course. For details see the UNR General Catalog

http://www.cis.unr.edu/ecatalog/Default.aspx?catalog_list_id=388

The University Writing Center (784-6030) exists for the benefit of undergraduate and graduate students. Free consultations by appointment. Your student fees support the work of this center as well as the math and tutoring centers, and it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services.

Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may have been given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.

Late Work: I will accept *one* late assignment (by previous agreement) without penalty. However, *any* late work that inconveniences your classmates (late draft for in-class review; late work on the collaborative memoir) will be penalized with the loss of one-tenth of the available points (generally the equivalent of one letter grade). *I will accept NO work of any kind after the final deadline noted above on the course schedule.*

APPENDIX: Assignments for English 475A

First paper: Memoir essay

Draft, revise, and submit a 3-5 page autobiographical essay or memoir. The topic is your choice, but this should be an original piece of nonfiction writing, and you should follow these steps:

Try at least three of the draft suggestions listed below.

Submit a COMPLETE draft of your work to your writing group by ____.

Using the comments and suggestions of your group, revise the draft and submit both draft and revision to me on or before ____.

To prepare for writing your memoir/autobiographical essay for this class, try writing several drafts based on three or more of the following approaches. All of these are techniques that autobiographers have used at one time or another.

Mythic Ancestor: Write a portrait of a mythic ancestor. "Mythic" suggests someone who exists on the other side of the mist, someone known through family folklore, yarns, old photos or objects, names, imagined or retold history, fame, or feeling. Whomever you choose, try to write him or her with as much detail as you possibly can. This is a good opportunity to interview family or community members. When you have done this draft, consider in what ways you have changed or been affected since you began writing it. In what ways is the mythic ancestor's story also your story?

Object: Make a list of several objects that have personal "resonance" for you--a pebble from a beach visited some time ago, a crumpled concert ticket in your pocket, a particular t-shirt. Choose one of these (obviously it doesn't have to be an exotic or valuable object) and discuss its significance for you by writing about the experience(s) that involved that object.

Sense of Place: Describe a landscape or a culture that you can honestly say had become a part of you. Let us see those surroundings clearly, through your eyes. Show how the landscape or the culture has influenced your way of thinking or shaped your way of seeing. You may find that you have mixed feelings about that environment and its effects on you; this is expectable and probably a good thing. Try to avoid both sentimentality and defensiveness in your draft--but if these qualities emerge in your writing, examine them closely.

Outsider: Describe a situation when you found yourself in a minority, at odds with the expectations of others, or suddenly disabused of some of your assumptions. OR describe a situation when you suddenly, unexpectedly felt that you had "come home." That is, you found that someone (or some other people) shared and enhanced your ideas, attitudes, or background.

Issue: Consider an issue that is so important to you that you have argued, written letters, protested, blogged or made other efforts on behalf of your point of view. Do not write yet another argument, but rather consider why this issue matters to you. What are the experiences that have led you to this particular point of view?

Then and Now: Describe a photo of yourself, preferably one taken between ages 7 and 15. Write your description so that the reader can see the picture without looking at the photo. See if you can write yourself into the presence of the person in the photo. Conclude with speculations on why the child in the picture both is and is not you. You may find a snapshot more useful for this project than a studio photo, but either is acceptable.

Second paper: Collaborative Memoir

The assignment

This is an experimental writing assignment, done in stages. Time will be allotted in class to do the first step and parts of the second, third, and fourth. I encourage you to communicate with your partner/collaborator and reflect on your own work outside of class time as well. Final revised versions of this assignment (about 5 pages) are due at the beginning of class, ____, and your written reflection on the process (about 2 pages) is due on or before ____.

Step 1: Meet with your assigned partner from our class (or partners if we have an uneven number of students) to begin a series of conversations that will eventually provide sufficient material for you to write a portion of that person's memoir:

- Begin with general get-acquainted conversation as suggested in class.
- Set time limits so that your two interviews (of each other) will be roughly the same length.
- Use some of the interview questions devised in class, and then create your own questions as you pursue what appear to be the most promising stories your partner has to tell.
- Your goal for this step is to gather adequate material for you to draft a few pages of ghostwritten memoir of your partner.

AT HOME: Draft the memoir of your partner, using first person throughout. As you write, note any gaps in the narrative and devise questions to ask your partner that will help you connect and enrich the narrative.

Step 2: In class, do a second set of interviews with your collaborative partner. If you wish, you may read parts of your draft in order to ask questions or get feedback from your collaborator, but this is not the time for formal response to the draft.

AT HOME: a) Continue to revise your draft of your as-told-to memoir. b) Write a two-page reflection on the process so far (single draft). You may send one or both of these drafts to your collaborator.

Step 3: After a class discussion of the collaborative process so far, meet with your collaborator/partner to review your current memoir draft and your reflection. At this meeting, the two of you should decide what your final product(s) will be. Here are some possibilities: a) two separate ghostwritten memoirs; b) two "as-told-to" memoir essays along with commentary by the authors (cf. Malcolm & Haley); c) two versions of the same memoir; d) a co-written story of the collaborative process.

AT HOME: Write and revise your part of the document(s) that you and your collaborator have agreed on.

Step 4: In class, you will have a brief time to discuss and respond to the papers with an eye to revision--with your partner, or perhaps with another pair of writers.

Step 5: Submit your revised collaborative memoir(s), together with a brief (2 pages) reflection on the process. If the collaboration produces a single paper (see Step 3), the reflections should be individually written. If the collaboration produces two separate products (two ghostwritten memoirs), then the reflection should be co-written by you and your collaborator.

Third paper: Critical Essay

The assignment

Length: about 7 pages. 250 points.

Due dates: ____ to your writing group; ____ workshop; revised drafts submitted ____.

This time you are writing for an audience of English majors, alumni, teachers, and other avid readers who think that, whatever else autobiography may be, it is not literary. That is, they believe that nonfiction life writing does not make artistic use of language, characterization, plot, arrangement, metaphor--or any of the literary devices you learned about in your other English classes.

For this critical analysis paper, you will study a theme or problem posed by one or two of the autobiographical texts we have read this semester, and you will discuss the writer's literary strategies for dealing with that theme or problem. These might include style, dialogue, characterization, plot devices, arrangement and organization, imagery, and so on. To support and focus your argument, I suggest you use relevant autobiography criticism from Smith and Watson or other secondary sources.

For example, in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston faces a dilemma: she needs to treat her extended family's traditional Chinese culture and stories with respect (because they are also part of her identity), and at the same time she wants to criticize that culture's treatment of girls and women. For your audience, you will show how, and how successfully, she deals with this issue through comparison, metaphor, story, juxtaposition of cultural descriptions, and so on.

Suggested process:

- Choose the text, texts, or excerpts that interest you and the relevant problem, issue, or theme you would like to explore. This is an important step because you want to study an issue that's meaningful to you.
- Reread the text carefully and mark strategies and techniques the writer uses to convey the theme or deal with the problem.
- At the same time, choose segments from Smith and Watson and/or from secondary sources dealing with your chosen texts. You are looking for a critical "lens" that will help you focus and clarify your project.
- Develop a thesis or argument that will clearly focus your paper.
- Support that thesis with specifics from your chosen autobiographical and critical text(s)
- Be sure to include a strong "so-what" introduction and conclusion.
- Don't forget the works cited page. This time you will include on this page your primary text(s) along with any secondary texts.

Tips:

- It is not necessary to be "defensive" in this essay: you are simply trying to use methods that your audience appreciates in order to show them something important about "literary" autobiography.
- You are writing a literary argument, so you will need to have a good, strong thesis. This will help you organize your essay and select your evidence from the text. (Otherwise, you are likely to end up with a random series of examples.)
- You are welcome to use other critical essays on your chosen text as a source of ideas and critical quotations. It is better to go through the library site to access these articles; Google and other public search engines may give you reviews from popular magazines, but they are not very helpful for finding scholarly articles. If you use secondary texts, cite them correctly and observe all the usual criteria for avoiding plagiarism.
- Not all autobiographical texts will lend themselves to this treatment as not all nonfiction life writing is--or aims to be--literary. For example, Kingston and Santos *may* give you more possibilities than Malcolm X; you may also choose to discuss one of the excerpts that we read in *Modern American Memoirs*. If you would like a real challenge, you might want to compare a "literary" and a "nonliterary" (or less consciously literary) memoir--two works that deal with a similar problem, such as racial prejudice or a difficult relationship with a parent or sibling.
- It is not necessary to heap unqualified praise on your chosen text(s). Writers may also be unsuccessful in their uses of some techniques.
- If you would like help with your topic and focus, feel free to email me with your question.

Fourth paper: Review Essay

The assignment

For this essay, you will choose a memoir from a list I will provide. The full draft of your review of this book is due to your group ____ for an in-class workshop on _____. The revised draft is due on _____.

Please follow these instructions for your essay:

1. Read the autobiography or memoir that you signed up for in class before spring break. As you read (and reread) this book, mark and annotate passages that portray or highlight themes you feel are important. Also mark passages that you find distinctive or troubling for other reasons (e.g., voice, manner of express, author's insights).
2. After reading the book, locate and read at least three reviews (not scholarly articles) of the book. Of this minimum of three reviews, only one may be a reader review from Amazon, Goodreads, or another reader site. Most book reviews are published within a year (maybe two) of the book's publication or reissue date. You will be able to locate most of these through the UNR library's site. Be sure to get the full bibliographical reference for each review.
3. Write a 4-5 page review of your book. You should cover the literary elements (story, character, genre, style, etc.) and thematic elements that you think are most relevant to this book. (Don't try to review everything!) You should refer to or quote at least one of the reviews you consulted (see #2). You may, if you wish, introduce comparisons with other memoirs you have read, especially if they are from the same subgenre.
4. AT THE END OF THE SEMESTER: With a panel of 2-3 other students who have read this or similar memoirs, prepare a presentation on your book that will be given during the last week of classes. Particulars for this presentation will be discussed after spring break.

Sample Midterm Exam

English 475A
American Autobiography
Midterm Take-home Examination (100 points)
Due date: March 12, 2015

Your Name: _____

Instructions: This is an open-book, take-home exam. Please submit your answers, word-processed and printed out, on or before the due date. Be sure to attach these exam questions to the front of your answers. Each answer will be evaluated on its accuracy, completeness, conciseness, and (where requested) relevance of examples.

1. (2 points) Write a one-sentence definition of “autobiography.” Then explain in a few sentences why some readers prefer the term “life writing” (or “life narrative”) instead of “autobiography.”
2. (10 points) Briefly define (one or two sentences) each of the following as it applies to autobiographical writing:
 - a. Site of storytelling
 - b. Mediation
 - c. Polyvocality
 - d. The autobiographical subject
 - e. Coaxers
3. (8 points, four sentences) Ethnography and celebrity autobiography are two kinds of “as-told-to” life writing.
 - a. In each of these forms, how do the (power) relationships of the subject and the writer differ?
 - b. What is an ethical problem that can arise in each of these two forms of collaborative life writing? (Two ethical problems total.)
4. (8 points, list) Name FOUR of the many different kinds of autobiographical writing that have been produced in this country during its history. Give an example of each.
5. (8 points, list) Smith and Watson suggest that we think of the autobiographical “I” as not one but four. List the four kinds of “I” and give a specific example of each from one of our class readings. (Don’t forget that you can use the short readings from *Modern American Memoirs*.)
6. (14-point one-page answer) Autobiographical writing is not just storytelling; it’s also problem-solving. Choose ONE of the following key problems in one of our book-length texts and explain how the book’s author(s) described it and chose to solve it:
 - a. Malcolm X and Alex Haley responding to the rapid changes in Malcolm’s life and views, OR
 - b. Kingston trying to figure out what’s real in talk-story (or storytelling)
7. (10-point one-page answer) Kingston says of the story of her no-name aunt, “Unless I can see her story flowing into mine, she gives me no ancestral help.” Kingston then goes on to tell stories about many different women in her family and community. Choose one of these women (other than the no-name aunt), describe her major characteristics as Kingston portrays them, and explain how that woman’s story aids Maxine in her quest to create or define her own personal identity.
8. (20-point two-page answer) Despite the great differences in the two autobiographical texts, both Malcolm and Kingston deal prominently with issues of gender and race. Choose ONE of these (gender or race), compare how the TWO texts deal with it, and describe your own response to each.
9. (20-point two-page answer). Choose ONE:

- a. Picture yourself talking to a friend who's about to read an autobiography and wonders how reliable it is. Explain to this friend what he or she can reasonably expect life narrators to tell the truth about. Also explain what your friend should keep in mind about "autobiographical truth." Be sure to include specific examples from our readings in this course. You may also include examples from your own outside reading if you wish.
- b. Picture yourself talking to a friend who's normally a fiction fan but is now about to read a book-length American autobiographical text (an autobiography or memoir). This friend would like some guidance from you on what to expect (and what NOT to expect) from autobiography in terms of structure, completeness, and verifiability (or authenticity). Provide this friend with three or four key "tools" for reading autobiography. Be sure to include specific examples from our readings in this course. You may also include examples from your own outside reading if you wish.