

Living life as a legacy – write your own obituary**Requires: 45-60 minutes of class time and 60 minutes of time outside of class.**

Most people don't have the luxury of writing their own obituary, but, as a summary of a person's life from the other end, they offer an overview of the things a person found most important, as well as what others felt about the contributions the deceased person made to those around them.

Share some examples of obituaries some from 'famous' people and some from local papers and discuss the elements that make such articles interesting or special, strange or touching. A thorough class discussion will prepare students to write their own obituaries.

Encourage the students to think about the life they would like to live and then try to imagine what others would say about them when they are gone. They will often come up with 'big jobs' they would like to do – such as work for the UN or be a famous human rights lawyer but (so far) no one has come up with 'the best pharmaceutical salesperson on the west coast'. They more commonly address things about character, passions, family and how they 'lived their life' and what they 'left behind'.

You can then assign writing their own obituary outside of class or have them begin drafting one as a free write in class. You can allow students to keep these private, but given obituaries are, by definition, public, it seems more apt to have them share them with the class. One option that seems to work is to have them swap them around the class (not with their immediate neighbor as that is often going to be their friend) and ask them to volunteer to read the obit of someone they would have liked to meet.

Once they have shared their after-life story, have them answer a few questions. These can be done on the back and they can be kept private so they can be honest with themselves.

Questions:

How do the things I want to be 'remembered for' or better yet, 'known for' among my family, friends and colleagues while I am still here! - connect to what I would like to do in my career?

What are my strengths and how can I use them to best effect in my professional world?

What are my weaknesses and how can I work to change them over the course of my life?

How can I live my life as a legacy or gift to the future?

What three words would I like to have in my obituary no matter what I do in any other aspect of my life?