Constraining vs. Liberating Textual Models

Encountering Cheri Register’s memoir *Packinghouse Daughter* as a graduate student astounded me: someone had written about my hometown of Albert Lea, MN? Learning Minnesota is host to a robust literary scene also changed me. As a first-generation college student now college professor, the question of how class discussions and example texts broaden or narrow students’ understanding of writing possibilities has reverberated within me. In my time teaching an introductory creative nonfiction course, I’ve made a point of assigning uncommon topics, unusual formats, texts by marginalized writers, and texts divergent from ESWE. What windows can we open to help students see a spectrum of writing options that includes themselves?

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WRIT 1006: Journal and Memoir Writing—Three courses

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| --- | --- |
| **Categories** | **Texts** |
| Uncommon topics | Perfume—Fluid StatesFracking—Fluid StatesDeath—The Long Goodbye, All the Wild Hungers, We’ll Be the Last Ones to Let You DownPackinghouse—Packinghouse DaughterStillbirth—The Chronology of WaterSperm donors—InheritanceChicken farm—Locally LaidMidwest—Imagining Home |
| Unusual formats | Fluid StatesThe ArgonautsThe Chronology of WaterAll the Wild Hungers |
| Marginalized texts | Writers of Color | Kiese LaymonShapes of Native Nonfiction—essays and editors |
| Regional writers | Karen BabineCheri RegisterRachel HanelLucie AmundsenImagining Home—essays and editors |
| Regional publishers | GraywolfMilkweed EditionsMinnesota Historical Society PressUMN Press |
| Queer writers | Maggie NelsonLidia YuknavitchShapes of Native Nonfiction--essays |
| Texts divergent from ESWE | HeavyShapes of Native NonfictionThe Chronology of Water |

Gaps I want to fill:

* Disabled writers
* Graphic memoir
* More alternate formats
* Second person
* Co-authored texts
* Student recommended texts
* Decentralize authority
* Coffeehouse Press
* Smaller presses around the state / region (New Rivers Press, Holy Cow! Press, etc.)
* Bringing more of these texts into my other courses—Creative Nonfiction’s Sunday Short Reads—[“Thieves” by Jerald Walker](https://mailchi.mp/creativenonfiction/sunday-short-reads-072)

Formats we’ve explored:

* Chronological memoir
* Collage memoir
* Essay collection (single author)
* Essay anthology
* Memoir in essays
* Hermit crab essay: [A Log Cabin Square](https://thediagram.com/18_2/minor.html), [In Lieu of Flowers](https://mailchi.mp/creativenonfiction/sunday-short-reads-057), [Mother](https://gay.medium.com/mother-a-dictionary-95d18df2b843)
* Micro essay
* Long-form essay
* Mid-range essay
* Prose poetry

Textbooks

* Gutkind, Lee. *You Can’t Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction—from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything in Between.*
* Kephart, Beth. *Handling the Truth: On the Writing of Memoir.*
* Ellis, Sherry. *Now Write! Nonfiction: Memoir, Journalism, and Creative Nonfiction Exercises from Today’s Best Writers and Teachers.*
* Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies <https://www.assayjournal.com/>

Notes:

* Not all connect with students, but they can learn something from each one.
* Was able to work with a student on an independent writing project after they took my class.
* I didn’t know what an MFA or professional conferences were. I didn’t know what steps to take. Goodreads. Magazines. How to apply for jobs. How to submit my work. What the writing process looks like. What submissions look like from the editorial side. I’m still learning. In math, they make you show your work before you can share the final product. Sometimes I think we just show students the final product. I’m trying to pull back the curtain. Take students through my drafts. Compare tool in MS Word.

Texts

* Babine, Karen. *Water and What We Know: Following the Roots of a Northern Life*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
* Gutkind, Lee. *You Can’t Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction—from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything in Between*. Boston: DeCapo Press/Lifelong Books, 2012.
* Nelson, Maggie. *The Argonauts*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2015.
* O’Rourke, Megan. *The Long Goodbye: A Memoir*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2011.
* Register, Cheri*. Packinghouse Daughter: A Memoir*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000.
* Amundsen, Lucie B. *Locally Laid: How We Built a Plucky, Industry-Changing Egg Farm—from Scratch*. Avery, 2016.
* Hanel, Rachel. *We’ll Be the Last Ones to Let You Down: Memoir of a Gravedigger’s Daughter*. U of Minnesota P, 2013.
* Kephart, Beth. *Handling the Truth: On the Writing of Memoir*. Gotham Books, 2013.
* Purpura, Lia. *Rough Likeness: Essays*. Sarabande Books, 2011.
* Vinz, Mark, and Thom Tammaro, editors. *Imagining Home: Writing from the Midwest*. U of Minnesota P, 1995.
* Yuknavitch, Lidia. *The Chronology of Water: A Memoir*. Hawthorn Books & Literary Arts, 2010.
* Babine, Karen. *All the Wild Hungers: A Season of Cooking and Cancer*. Milkweed Editions, 2019.
* Czerwiec, Heidi. *Fluid States*. Pleiades Press, 2019.
* Laymon, Kiese. *Heavy: An American Memoir*. Scribner, 2018.
* Shapiro, Dani. *Inheritance: A Memoir of Genealogy, Paternity, and Love*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2019.
* Washuta, Elissa and Theresa Warburton. *Shapes of Native Nonfiction: Collected Essays by Contemporary Writers*. University of Washington Press, 2019.