



Pre-IB English 2A

Memoir Summer Reading Assignment

“In this world, and in our country—where so many of us feel a lack of connection, where the challenges seem so large—writers who dare to tell the brutal, honest truth about their humanity offer us a gift. They remind me that we are all part of the human family. They echo the heartache, love, grief, despair, shame, longing, ambition, joy that we all experience. They remind us that we are more alike than different. They make us feel less alone.” – Liz Scott, 2019

This summer, you are going to spend some time reading and analyzing a memoir from the list of choices below. Reading and analyzing your chosen memoir will help you develop as a reader, while introducing and reinforcing the IB Learner Profile Traits: Thinker, Inquirer, Knowledgeable, Communicator.

While reading your memoir, you will complete a series of tasks to prepare you for the first week of Pre-IB English 2A. It is imperative that you complete this summer work in order to be prepared for the first week of school. All work should be ready to turn in and use for a class assignment on the **second day of school**.

Assignment:

Step 1: Choose your Memoir.

Choose one of the memoirs to read from the list below. If you would like to read additional memoirs from the list, please do, but you are only required to read one of the books for your summer reading.

This Boy’s Life by Tobias Wolff

The “unforgettable” (*Time*) *This Boy’s Life* is the story of the young, tough-on-the-outside but vulnerable Toby Wolff. Separated by divorce from his father and brother, Toby and his mother travel from Florida to Utah to a small village in Washington state, with many stops along the way. As each place doesn’t quite work out, they pick up to find somewhere new. In the story of their journey, Wolff masterfully recreates the frustrations, cruelties, and joys of adolescence and presents a deeply poignant exploration of memory, dreams, and how we create a self. (Amazon.com)

Educated by Tara Westover

Born to survivalists in the mountains of Idaho, Tara Westover was seventeen the first time she set foot in a classroom. Her family was so isolated from mainstream society that there was no one to ensure the children received an education, and no one to intervene when one of Tara’s older brothers became violent. When another brother got himself into college, Tara decided to try a new kind of life. Her quest for knowledge transformed her, taking her over oceans and across continents, to Harvard and to Cambridge University. Only then would she wonder if she’d traveled too far, if there was still a way home. (Amazon.com)

A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah

There may be as many as 300,000 child soldiers, hopped-up on drugs and wielding AK-47s, in more than fifty conflicts around the world. Ishmael Beah used to be one of them. He is one of the first to tell his story in his own words.

In *A Long Way Gone*, Beah, now twenty-six years old, tells a riveting story. At the age of twelve, he fled attacking rebels and wandered a land rendered unrecognizable by violence. By thirteen, he'd been picked up by the government army, and Beah, at heart a gentle boy, found that he was capable of truly terrible acts. Eventually released by the army and sent to a UNICEF rehabilitation center, he struggled to regain his humanity and to reenter the world of civilians, who viewed him with fear and suspicion. This is, at last, a story of redemption and hope. (alongwaygone.com)

The Distance Between Us by Reyna Grande

Reyna Grande vividly brings to life her tumultuous early years in this “compelling...unvarnished, resonant” (*BookPage*) story of a childhood spent torn between two parents and two countries. As her parents make the dangerous trek across the Mexican border to “El Otro Lado” (The Other Side) in pursuit of the American dream, Reyna and her siblings are forced into the already overburdened household of their stern grandmother. When their mother at last returns, Reyna prepares for her own journey to “El Otro Lado” to live with the man who has haunted her imagination for years, her long-absent father.

Funny, heartbreaking, and lyrical, *The Distance Between Us* poignantly captures the confusion and contradictions of childhood, reminding us that the joys and sorrows we experience are imprinted on the heart forever, calling out to us of those places we first called home. (Amazon.com)

Sigh, Gone by Phuc Tran

In 1975, during the fall of Saigon, Phuc Tran immigrates to America along with his family. By sheer chance they land in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, a small town where the Trans struggle to assimilate into their new life. In this coming-of-age memoir told through the themes of great books such as *The Metamorphosis*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Iliad*, and more, Tran navigates the push and pull of finding and accepting himself despite the challenges of immigration, feelings of isolation, and teenage rebellion, all while attempting to meet the rigid expectations set by his immigrant parents.

Appealing to fans of coming-of-age memoirs such as *Fresh Off the Boat*, *Running with Scissors*, or tales of assimilation like Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Displaced* and *The Refugees*, *Sigh, Gone* explores one man's bewildering experiences of abuse, racism, and tragedy and reveals redemption and connection in books and punk rock. Against the hairspray-and-synthesizer backdrop of the '80s, he finds solace and kinship in the wisdom of classic literature, and in the subculture of punk rock, he finds affirmation and echoes of his disaffection. In his journey for self-discovery Tran ultimately finds refuge and inspiration in the art that shapes—and ultimately saves—him. (Amazon.com)

How Dare the Sun Rise by Sandra Uwiringiyimana

This profoundly moving memoir is the remarkable and inspiring true story of Sandra Uwiringiyimana, a girl from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who tells the tale of how she survived a massacre, immigrated to America, and overcame her trauma through art and activism.

Sandra was just ten years old when she found herself with a gun pointed at her head. She had watched as rebels gunned down her mother and six-year-old sister in a refugee camp. Remarkably, the rebel didn't pull the trigger, and Sandra escaped.

Thus began a new life for her and her surviving family members. With no home and no money, they struggled to stay alive. Eventually, through a United Nations refugee program, they moved to America, only to face yet another ethnic disconnect. Sandra may have crossed an ocean, but there was now a much wider divide she had to overcome. And it started with middle school in New York.

In this memoir, Sandra tells the story of her survival, of finding her place in a new country, of her hope for the future, and how she found a way to give voice to her people. (Amazon.com)

They Called Us Enemy by George Takei, Justin Eisinger, Steven Scott; Harmony Becker

New York Times Bestseller!

A stunning graphic memoir recounting actor/author/activist George Takei's childhood imprisoned within American concentration camps during World War II. Experience the forces that shaped an American icon -- and America itself -- in this gripping tale of courage, country, loyalty, and love.

George Takei has captured hearts and minds worldwide with his captivating stage presence and outspoken commitment to equal rights. But long before he braved new frontiers in Star Trek, he woke up as a four-year-old boy to find his own birth country at war with his father's -- and their entire family forced from their home into an uncertain future.

In 1942, at the order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, every person of Japanese descent on the west coast was rounded up and shipped to one of ten "relocation centers," hundreds or thousands of miles from home, where they would be held for years under armed guard.

They Called Us Enemy is Takei's firsthand account of those years behind barbed wire, the joys and terrors of growing up under legalized racism, his mother's hard choices, his father's faith in democracy, and the way those experiences planted the seeds for his astonishing future. (Amazon.com)

Step 2: Review the Terms to Know and Traits of a Memoir.

Terms to Know:

Motif: A motif is an element or idea that recurs throughout a work of literature. Motifs, which are often collections of symbols, help reinforce the central themes of a work.

Theme: A theme is a universal idea, lesson, or message explored throughout a work of literature. You will need to be able to identify both thematic ideas and three or four theme statements. A work's thematic *idea* is the broader topic it touches upon—for instance: *judgement, love, revenge, forgiveness, etc.* A work's thematic *statement* is the particular argument the writer makes about that topic through his or her work, such as: *Human judgement is imperfect; Love cannot be bought; Getting revenge on someone else will not fix your problems; Learning to forgive is part of becoming an adult.*

5 Traits of a Memoir:

1. **TRUTH** Although it is written like a story, it all really happened. Dialogue serves to make the story more engaging and although the author surely does not remember word for word what was said in the past, the essence of each conversation is truthful. In memoir, the author stands behind her story saying to the readers, “This happened; this is true.”
2. **THEME** Memoir does not cover an entire life from start to finish. Instead, it focuses on “episodes” or events in a person’s life. Sometimes it even jumps back and forth in time rather than being chronological. The episodes, however, are all connected in some way via theme or motifs.
3. **VOICE** The fingerprint of the writer. Each writer has his/her own particular linguistic quirks, type of language used, formality, way of expressing him/herself.
4. **POV** Always in First Person Narrative. The narrator is the protagonist; the person who is telling story. Sometimes they even speak directly to the reader in 2nd person but not always.
5. **MEMORY AND MUSING** All the events in a memoir were chosen to be included by the author because they are important/significant in some way to their life. However, the memoir is written later in their lives as they reflect back on the experience.

Step 3: Read the memoir.

While reading annotate (color mark) for theme ideas and motifs found in the memoir. Look for symbols or ideas that repeat throughout the text that help to develop the theme statement(s). You should also annotate by writing comments in the margins of your reading including reactions, questions you might have, connections you can make to the reading, etc. We do not expect every page to be written on. Quality over quantity.

Step 4: Complete the questions below.

In a separate Word document, answer each question using complete sentences. Use proper grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Be ready to submit this along with your annotated memoir by the second day of school.

1. Describe 3 motifs that were present in the memoir and explain their significance to the overall theme.
2. Identify 3 theme statements from the memoir and why the author chose to include these lessons in his/her text.
3. What was the most surprising or unbelievable moment in the memoir for you? How did you react to it?
4. How might you describe the voice of your author? What kind of style or attitude do

they have as they tell the story?

5. Think of a particular event the author included in the memoir. Why do you think they included it in their text?
6. Thinking of the same event from question 5, how did the author feel about the event when it first happened? How has their perspective of that event changed now that they're an adult?
7. What connections can you make to this memoir from your personal life (similar experiences, emotions, family life, etc. or know someone with similar experiences)?
8. If you were writing a memoir, what is one event from your own life that you would include in it and why? Be detailed.

NOTE ON PLAGIARISM:

We expect your analysis of the text to be based on your own ideas and observations of the text as you read. Be careful not to take ideas directly from other sources for this project.

All submissions will be screened for plagiarism. Students will not receive credit for work that has taken ideas directly from other sources.