

MEMOIR AS LITERATURE AND HISTORY*



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*Who is Malala? I am Malala and
THIS IS MY STORY.*

—MALALA YOUSAFZAI

BACKGROUND

So what’s a memoir? And what’s the difference between a memoir and an autobiography? Or a diary?

There are a few things that make a memoir stand out from other nonfiction books. A memoir focuses on a “personal account of an event, a season, or a memory that is generally very personal, evocative, and focused.”

But isn’t that the same thing as an autobiography? Not quite. Memoir differs from autobiography in that the memoir concerns a specific, concentrated period within a life, whereas an autobiography tends to recount the story of a life that is generally more all-embracing, with a greater chronological sweep and more linear structure.

I Am Malala is a memoir because Malala walks us through her experience of being attacked by the Taliban. She gives us her own insights and a very personal perspective of what her life was like for a specific period of time. Memoirs make powerful witnesses to history, and, in Malala’s case, a strong testament to injustice. Malala’s memoir illustrates the power of contrasts—from descriptions of her assailant’s shaking hand as he shoots her at close range to teenage preoccupations with *Twilight* books and arguments with Munneba, her loving but possessive best friend.



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*Adapted from resource guide material written by Julie Donovan

ACTIVITY

Now that you know what a memoir is, it's time to try it yourself! Part of being an advocate for girls is self-reflection and this is an opportunity for you to do just that. Take a moment and think about an experience in your life that stands out to you. It can be positive, like a year you discovered something you love. It may also be a challenging time in your life, like a fight with a friend or a family tragedy.

Once you have that moment in mind, it's time to get creative! Think of SIX words to describe it—no more, no less. You can add illustrations, incorporate movement, or even dance out your six words!

SHARE YOUR SIX-WORD MEMOIRS AS A GROUP AND TALK ABOUT YOUR REACTIONS:

- Why did you choose that moment?
- Was it difficult to come up with a way to describe that moment in your life in only six words? If so, why?
- Why do you think a memoir might be more compelling to read than an autobiography or a diary?

DISCUSS

- How might your six-word memoir help others understand something better in their lives, give someone comfort, or help someone grow?
- Can Malala's memoir help us understand something better in our lives? In the lives of others? If so, how?
- What might Malala's six-word memoir be?

TAKE IT FURTHER!

Why not make this digital? Build awareness and create interest in Malala's memoir by making Malala's six-word memoir into posters and social media posts. Get permission to put up the posters around school. Nothing gets students talking like clues, puzzles, and a game of "Guess Who?" Make your posters into a guessing game and then reveal Malala's identity over the school PA system. You can do this for other inspiring women leaders on March 8, International Women's Day, too!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following memoirs to learn more about how impactful one person's story can be:

Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi

Three Little Words by Ashley Rhodes-Courter

Model by Cheryl Diamond

The Bite of the Mango by Mariatu Kamara