

Six-Word Memoir Assignment
3 points
Due: Thursday, September 1 in class

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) was a Nobel Prize and Pulitzer Prize winning American author and journalist. His spare prose is simple and understated. He explains his “Ice-berg” theory in Death in the Afternoon:

“If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing.”

Legend credits Hemingway with the first six-word story. Though debated, Hemingway composed this story on a napkin to win a bet with his contemporaries. The story was simple in appearance, but understated: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

In 2006 SMITH Magazine and Twitter reinvented the six-word story as the six-word memoir. They have had over 11,000 submissions.

Your assignment is to create three six-word memoirs: one from the perspective of a fairy tale or cartoon character, one about yourself by yourself and one about yourself but from the perspective of someone else. Bring your memoirs to class on Thursday recorded in your notebook and on the notecards. Each memoir must be true and tell a story. Mark Tredinnick writes in The Little Green Grammar Book, “Every piece of writing, no matter how flat and useful, is a crowd of stories, and each of them is a sentence. Every sentence tells a tale: it names someone (or something) and tells you something about them- what they did; what they are; or what happened to them” (19). Let’s see what story you tell in exactly six words.

Here are some tips:

- The story should be about YOU.
- Force yourself to be creative.
- Make revisions. Put the six best words in the best order.
- Remember Hemingway’s ice-berg theory, sometimes understated is best, some times not.
- Tredinnick defines a sentence as something that names someone or something else and tells you their stories.
- Have fun, write a few memoirs, and then choose the best.
- Check out the reverse of this page and the blog for some famous examples

- “Antidepressants ruined emo music for me.” – Lucy Waters
- “Bachelor Party. YouTube video. Wedding cancelled.” –Daniel Little
- “Born with big nose. Pursued comedy.” –Andy Borowitz
- “Straight-A student, now flunking judgment.” – Miranda Kaplan
- “Normal person becomes psychotic on Twitter.” –Robin Slick
- “Was bored, went skydiving, now quadriplegic.” –Daniel Van Werkhoven
- “Son of psychopath, survived EuroDisney. Twice.” –Andrew Hall
- “He’s 26. I’m 40. Me cougar!” –Kelley Allison
- “Insomniac dreamer; a thousand times goodnight.” Elisa Shevitz
- “My dogtags dangle in the dirt.” –Marcus Nogueira
- “Goth girl. White dog. Lint roller.” Megan Durham
- “Ending our relationship on Facebook? Classy.” –Quin Browne
- “I ran with scissors and lived.” –Rienne Smith
- “Heart in SF, arm in Vietnam.” –Harlan Stanton
- “Neurotic hypochondriac seeks medical attention, please.” –Jessica Lester
- “Journalism? Hah! Just make stuff up.” –Dave Barry
- “Beer, pizza. Who needs six words?” –Ron Heller
- “Regularly disqualifying myself for public office.” –Jess Walter
- “Nobody cared, then they did. Why?” –Chuck Klosterman
- “Hillbilly does right by his teeth.” –Jason Snyder
- “Smart, tall, independent woman. Men scarce.” –Annie Schmidt
- “No shit I’m critical- you’re flawed.” –Elizabeth Koch
- “Asked and answered, asshole, next question.” –Joe Lockhart
- “Her blue eyes capture the distance.” –Sonya Cheuse
- “Topless dancer. Circus clown. Spy. Writer.” –Susan DiRende
- “Straight jacket on the gentle cycle.” –Stewart Rudy
- “dam smart- never lerned to spel.” –Rachel Ehrlich
- “Gin joints. Love affairs. No relation.” –Dean Ellis
- “Awkward girl takes chances. Fun ensues.” –Charlotte Riley
- “Losing your identity can be fearsome.” –Robyn Crawford
- “Impoverished black male. Harvard Law bound.” –Robert Young
- “Adopted? Are you fucking shitting me?” –Darius Logan
- “Hard to write poems from prison.” –Ellen Goldstein
- “The militant who became a monk.” –Mike Adams
- “Wanted world, got world plus lupus.” –Liz Futrell
- “Being a monk stunk. Better gay.” –Bob Redman
- “Found true love, married someone else.” –Bjorn Stromberg
- “Mistakenly kills kitten. Fears anything delicate.” –Susan Henderson
- “Bad breaks discovered at high speed.” –Johan Baumeister
- “Ex-wife and contractor now have house.” Drew Peck
- “Savior complex makes for many disappointments.” – Alanna Schubach
- “My spiritual path is 100 proof.” –John House
- “Lucky in love, unlucky in metabolism.” –Leah Weathersby
- “I like big butts, can’t lie.” –Dave Russ