

WRITE the WORLD REVIEW

A LITERARY JOURNAL PUBLISHING

STANDOUT TEEN WRITERS AGES 13 TO 19

Special Edition



MEMOIR
FEATURING
TEEN WRITERS

*Sponsored by the
Wayne Dyer Family
Foundation*

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Meet the Judge:

Dr. Tasha Faruqui



“For young writers, especially those new to memoir, don’t let anyone discourage you by saying memoir doesn’t sell or won’t get published. Your story is worth sharing—period.”

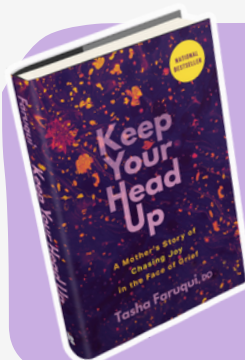
- Dr. Tasha Faruqui

As a doctor with extensive scientific training, when did you first think of yourself as a writer? What role has writing played in your life?

I honestly never thought of myself as a writer. I’ve always thought of myself as a storyteller—and just as importantly, a listener. One of the greatest privileges of being a physician is being invited into people’s lives, to hear their stories, to ask meaningful questions, and to hold what’s shared as something sacred and confidential.

Writing came later. It wasn’t something I set out to do—it was something I grew into. I began to realize that storytelling could be my doorway into writing. Instead of trying to become the kind of writer I thought I was supposed to be, I started by transcribing what I would naturally say out loud. In doing that, I also had to confront my own assumptions about what a “writer” should look like—and let those go.

[Read the full interview on the Write the World blog.](#)

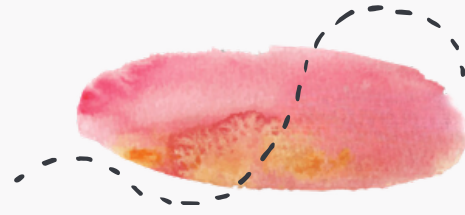


Dr. Tasha Faruqui is a pediatrician, speaker, advocate, and author of *Keep Your Head Up: A Mother’s Story of Chasing Joy in the Face of Grief* (Jossey-Bass, 2025). Tasha is a passionate advocate for parents of medically complex children and those experiencing anticipatory grief. Connect and learn more at tashafaruqui.com.



Memoir

About the Memoir Writing Competition



The Memoir Writing Competition, sponsored by the Wayne Dyer Family Foundation in May 2026, invited teens to share a snapshot of their unique story through an excerpt of their future memoir. Over 1,400 teens ages 13-19 from around the globe entered the competition. Beyond celebrating literary talent, the competition gave a space for young people to share their personal journeys.

The Prompt

"If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change." — Dr. Wayne Dyer

With the words of self-help author Wayne Dyer in mind, consider how to share your view of the world through an excerpt of your future memoir. How will this snapshot of your life story make "the things [readers] look at change"? Perhaps you'll explore a time when an inconvenience led to a happy coincidence. Or maybe you'll consider how a family tradition or favorite hobby has shaped you. Whether your submission explores love, grief, growth, culture, or the human condition, consider how your words can inspire a fresh perspective.

You need not tell your full life story in your piece; instead, zoom in on one snapshot—up to 1,000 words—that offers a slice of your identity and experience while enticing readers to, one day, read more.

Read the Winning Entries





WINNER

The Man I Once Knew

Mona James, Age 17, Canada

There is a man I once knew. He had green eyes and a towering figure. So tall he was that I was forever left craning my neck to see his face. He'd walk in wide steps, pacing the house. There, always, in his hand rested the newspaper. His kobo. A book. Hours he'd spend reading, the sound of flipping pages singing.

Books were a sort of treasure to him—one he had dedicated his life to, working at a publishing company. He would often bring free books home, displaying them with a proud grin. I would sit against the ground as he rambled about each book. They lined our house in every room,

creeping down the stairs attempting to conquer it whole.

And he'd crouch beside me. Smile wide. "Shall we read?"

A joy it was, the nights spent hearing his voice bring the stories to life. Wizards, dragons, knights. Elves, sailors, vikings. Stories upon stories. It soon felt as if that's all there was to life. The comforting embrace of fiction and worlds unexplored.

I do not know if he enjoyed fantasy. Perhaps he loathed the genre, reading it simply because I adored it. The spark of magic, where dragons roamed free and farmers could become heroes. "Everything is possible."

And I suppose it made me feel small—my issues shrinking as the Dark Lords sprung into my mind. There, in the bounds of my house. Shouts echoing. Sobs crackling.

It made me feel small.

So as the shadows danced, he read. I listened, head pressed against his shoulder. I could hear his heart beat. It was steady. One and two. Three and four.

We'd often walk around the pond near my house. Hand and hand, we'd go. "See that?" he'd say, "it's a swan." The chill bit into my cheeks. The wind tugged against my hair.

"It's pretty."

"Isn't it?"

And we'd walk.

On the days he'd pick me up from daycare, I'd race into his arms. He'd spin me round and round. The world would blur as his laughter lighted the room.

One and two.

Three and four.

I suppose there is no doubt, the man I once knew was a kind soul. Gentle with his touch and caring with his every breath. A good man, he was. A good father. All regarded him as such. And he'd place me on his shoulders, allowing me to tower over the world. I'd laugh, I'd yell.

He'd run.

The wind in my hair.

Then: an earthquake. It trembled. The ground rolled and I was tumbling from my bed, pressing my ear against the door. Light cascaded into my room from beneath. Cracks formed in the foundation of our house. The anger grew and the sobs of the night drew into day.

Divorce.

It was a word spoken in whispers, frowns and pity. As the sleepless told me of love running thin, people too different. Eye bags hung under their eyes, smiles weak.

The books were gone, shelves left barren. My mother would pace the length of the house, fingers lingering against the spaces we all used to be. Areas where we'd laugh, play games and sit. Dust piled. Books were donated. And her

cries whispered in the night. Soft gasps—soft apologies. So goes the story, married too soon. Cultural differences too wide. One white, one Japanese.

And I'm inbetween. Half and half. Split in custody, split in genetics.

"I'll still see you," he said. "Every Friday to Monday."

But soon it shrunk from four days, to three, and from three to two. Until, I saw him barely at all. He'd often tell me he found love. A woman so great, a person so kind. And he'd tell me of their life. "A blossoming flower. A seed growing. It takes time, you see?"

"Time?"

"Yes. Time. You understand don't you?"



“I think so. You’re like a tree?”

“A tree. Your mother and I were a strong tree.
But not strong enough.”

“And you’ll be stronger this time?”

He’d grin. “The strongest.”

As sunset came, I was left watching the swan swim across the pond alone. I wondered if he ever thought of me. If he ever missed me. It is a strange thing to watch someone you knew grow into a stranger. To know that forever was once promised, bound to fate, yet it could not be.

In the years, he would often send postcards. No longer did he live in Canada, travelling across the world. America. Japan. England. Switzerland.

I often believed he resided nowhere, living as a wayfarer in the books. The hotels were his home, uncertainty was his life. And really, I often imagined him as a sailor venturing the seas—family abandoned for the call of the sea was too great. In those years, it felt easier to imagine. As I read books on sailors leaving their families for noble causes. A father loving his family at home, but knowing his duty was at sea.

Still, anger simmered. A growing pain with the question why I was not enough. On some days, he’d text me saying he missed me. Yet, I never did reply. I allowed the silence to grow, stretching between us. As if silence were a dancer, skirts swirling.

So there goes the man I once knew. His face now blurred, voice forgotten. Still, I’ve come to stand tall.

My bones are certain of their identity: a Japanese-Canadian, raised by a single mother. I’ve come to take pride in who I am. My own books sprawl against the once-towering shelves. My eyes level with each.

And so, I pave my own path. A desire to write despite it all—to publish without his aid.

The sun sets above the pond, swans swimming. Clutched in my hand is my notebook—bursting with stories.



Judge's Commentary

This was a beautifully crafted piece that immediately drew me in through its vivid description of the father, particularly the physical details and memorable image of the narrator craning their neck to look up at him. I appreciated how the storytelling carried me along through the adventures and imagination of childhood while only subtly hinting at the deeper challenges unfolding beneath the surface. After the revelation of the divorce, portions of the essay felt almost poetic in their language and emotional resonance. The contrast between fantasy and reality, along with the thoughtful exploration of the author's intersecting identities, made for a powerful and memorable read.



-Dr. Tasha Faruqi

”

Author's Commentary

Described by Guest Judge Tasha Faruqi as a "beautifully crafted" and "powerful and memorable read," what inspired you to write the winning piece?

...The truth, I think every writer knows, is that writing and identity are closely intertwined. The things that you experience and notice are things you often write about. As such, I had wanted to try my hand at an identity and writing-related memoir—how my experiences shaped my development as a writer and imagination. Thus, "The Man I Once Knew" was born.

Throughout your memoir you delicately weave in dialogue, bringing the story to life. How does a memoirist balance truth with recreating such precise details?

I often find that emotional truth is the most valuable part of a memoir, and really, any form of fiction. However, memory is a fragile thing, and I cannot say for certain whether the dialogue I wrote was accurate word for word; in fact, I doubt it is. There is bound to be something forgotten and something misremembered. That said, the emotional truth behind it was true. When writing a memoir, it's important to recall the moments that compose your life and find meaning in them, whether they are small or large. The emotions you felt, the sensory details, the blurriness or the clarity of the moment. All of that contributes to the truth as you know it. From this, I wanted to try to re-create those raw feelings and memories through my writing, using symbolism, atmosphere and dialogue to convey how I had felt based on the limited things I could remember.



Mona James
Age 17
Canada



RUNNER-UP

Coming Home from Homelessness

**Mikayla Gordon, Age 18,
United States - Pennsylvania**

The door clicked, the bolt slid into place, standing tall and firm, separating a room of frightened children from the world outside. Darkness covered the room; the only light came from the hallway, seeping through the crack beneath the door. I listened carefully, holding

my month-old brother close to my chest, trying to keep him quiet and the rest of my brothers asleep. Soft footsteps crept up the hallway, and hope filled my chest. I ran over and peered through the hole only to find the footsteps descending to another room. The night my mother closed the hotel door, I wasn't sure she was ready to be a mom.

I had been living this life for months. I knew how things worked. I knew how to pack my whole life into one backpack and one laundry bin. I could only have what I could carry in my thirteen-year-old arms. The hotels were never busy during the week, so we had a wider range of breakfast options. But as the days passed and Friday approached, I had also learned what that meant. We would have to find somewhere else to stay. It meant packing everything into one car that didn't have enough seats for all of us. The timing took precise planning. Pack. Clean the room. First round of kids to the next hotel. Second round of kids. Sneak the cat into the room. Sleep. Move again in the morning.

I thought that weekend would be the same. The routine I had built in my head, the one that reflected some sort of normalcy, had never failed me. I heard my mom dialing number after number.

"Please, not a single open room? Two nights... no. One night. Just one night." Her voice broke with desperation.

I knew it would be a long night of moving, but I knew how to handle it. I started packing my clothes, folding them tightly so they would fit into my backpack. Then I moved onto my brother's toys, making sure I didn't leave anything behind. I cleaned every spill or mess

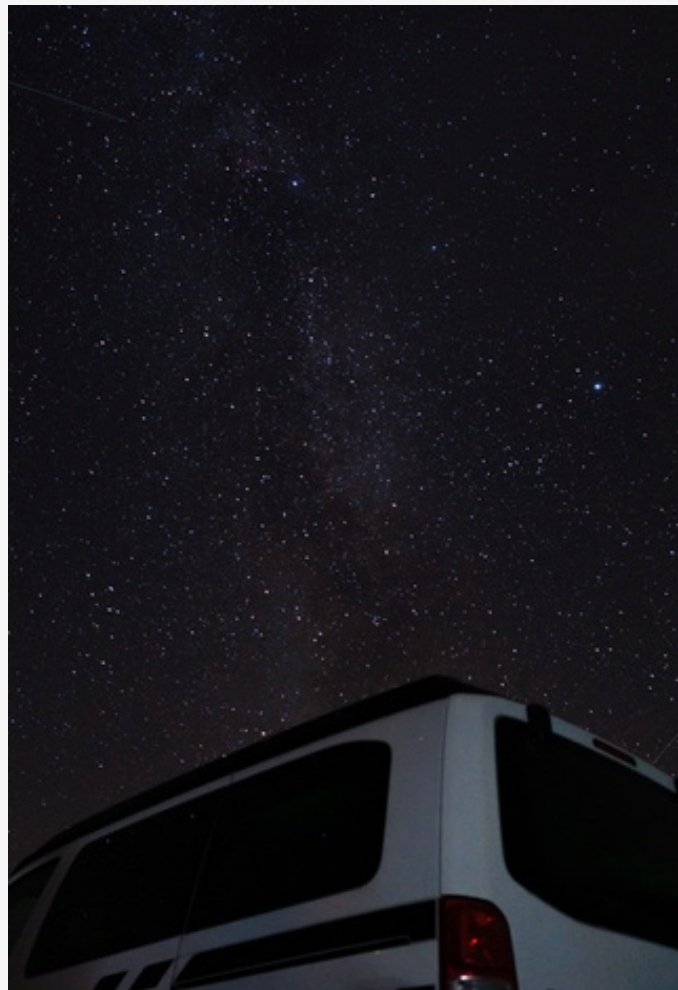
that would expose the long week of six children in one room. That was the rule. Never let anyone see what was happening behind the door. Eventually, my mom knocked the soft, familiar pattern on the door. The one we made up so we would know it was her.

I watched a fake smile form on her face.

“There’s a hotel down the street. One room for one night.”

I knew something was wrong. I could feel it. “So where are we going tomorrow?” I asked.

She didn’t answer. Instead, she gently squeezed my shoulders, hugged me, and walked out. My



older brother loaded the bags into the trunk. I strapped my twin brothers into their car seats, lifting them one in each arm, and held my younger brother’s hand tightly, like the world might take him if I let go.

Outside, the sky was pitch black, the stars the only light in the night. I remember thinking that even in complete darkness, there was still light somewhere. Still hope. The drive lasted five minutes, but it felt heavy. Everything felt off, and I couldn’t figure out why. I carried my brothers inside and followed my mom into the hotel while she reminded us to stay quiet because it was past midnight. The lobby was huge. A chandelier hung high above us, and the hallways stretched forever. For a second, it almost felt like a vacation. Then I stepped into the room, and was brought back to the reality that this was home.

Two beds stood in the middle of the room. Towels and small toiletries sat in a basket my older brother immediately claimed, while I unpacked bottles for the twins. I stood at the sink and washed the bottle like it was normal.

My mom came out of the bathroom, her face red and puffy. She had been crying. I could always tell. She pulled me aside.

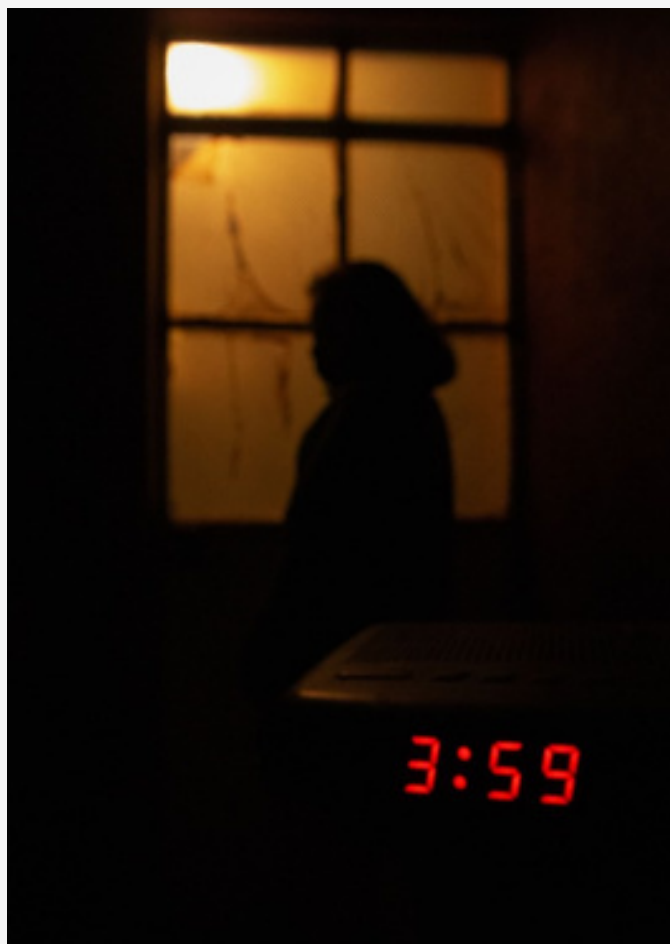
“Do you think you can take care of your brothers for a little while? I need to find another place for us to stay.”

I forced a smile, pushing down how tired I felt. “Yeah, of course. I’ve got it.” Pride filled my chest, even as I hoped she couldn’t read me the way I could read her.

“I love you.” Then she closed the door. The bolt slid into place again. I watched the seconds move across the clock. I balanced the responsibilities of a mother and a scared daughter. My brothers woke up every hour, needing to be fed, burped, or held. Needing their mother. I would settle one twin, and by the time I laid down beside my brother, another child would need me again. The darkness felt suffocating, the same darkness I feared was the one I had to protect them from. The silence felt loud, but I still longed for it between the cries.

Eventually, I drifted off to sleep with one twin on my chest, another curled into my arm, and my little brother pressed against my side. The clock read 3:30 a.m. My mother still wasn’t back. I didn’t know where she was. I didn’t know when she’d return. In that stillness, I needed my mom. I couldn’t be a mom. But the choice wasn’t mine.

Motherhood had found me, found a thirteen-year-old girl whose brothers slowly became her children. My youth wasn’t mine to live. My brothers deserved safety, love, and someone who would stay. I couldn’t wait for someone else to step in. Everything I carried, everything I learned, was shaped by love.



Judge's Commentary

I was immediately drawn in by the vivid descriptions of the hotel rooms and the routines the author came to know so intimately. The story skillfully hinted at a teenager becoming a mother, though not in the way readers might initially expect, creating both intrigue and emotional depth. The details of packing and the mother's growing desperation conveyed a powerful sense of journey, uncertainty, and love. Beautifully written, the essay kept me in suspense while simultaneously pulling me deeper into the narrative.



-Dr. Tasha Faruqi

Author's Commentary

Throughout your piece, you reference "darkness," setting the mood against the backdrop of the mother's desperation. How was this detail an important element in your narrative?

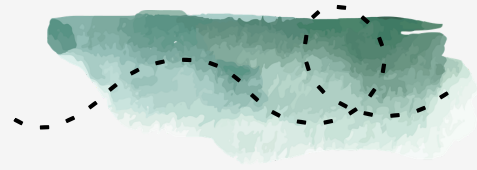
The darkness I wrote about was both literal and symbolic. So many nights of moving were spent in the dark, which, as a kid still scared me. I never knew what lurked around the corner or what monsters I made up in my head were real. That darkness was real, and it brought to life just how young I was, how I was still a kid. Symbolically, the darkness represented the unknown and hopelessness I felt. The path ahead was unclear, dark, and scary. While both of those remained true in my child mind, the desperation of my mother and the choice of perseverance showed that the darkness had to end.

What advice do you have for memoirists out there seeking to craft their own story?

The biggest thing I learned while writing my memoir was to just write. It seems so simple but when it's your story, it's hard to express the deepest of one small moment that completely shifted your life. No one else has the same story as you and it's easy to write to please the reader but just writing the real and honest truth about the event allows your story to be painted and your story deserves to be heard for what it is.



Mikayla Gordon
Age 18
United States



BEST PEER REVIEW

Andrew Santillana, age 17,
Philippines

For the piece:

A Door Closed, And a Door Opened

by MGC1056 (United States - Rhode Island)

I closed the book with a sadness I couldn't shake. A tear dripped down my face, then another and another. I never cry. Not for dogs dying in movies, not for a death in a book, but something changed. I just read an eleven-book series. That's new for me. Not something I did, but I loved this genre and loved these books. How could it end? I didn't want it to end.

A new creative feeling rose within me as I pondered this sad feeling of the series ending. What if I made my own series like this one? What if I made my own medieval family where each child had their own fairytale where they grew up and got married? What if I were a writer?

I love the first line already! Because at first, the reader would think that it was a sad story, but instead you were sad that it ended. That's a neat trick in changing the reader's interpretation!

I'd love to see you develop this idea more, maybe as a new paragraph. What did you feel when you were motivated to create? You could use more techniques of imagery! Maybe touch into tactual, kinesthetic, and organic senses of this feeling.

Read the Full Piece and Peer Review on Write the World

Judge's Commentary

I appreciated the tone of this review, which was both professional and warm throughout. The feedback felt intentional and thoughtful, and the reviewer effectively supported their observations with specific examples from the piece. I especially appreciated the use of the word "ethereal," which captured the essence of the writing beautifully. The shift to a slightly more relaxed and conversational style in the additional comments section was a nice touch, adding personality while maintaining the overall professionalism of the review.



-Dr. Tasha Faruqi

Reviewer's Commentary

How do you approach feedback for creative nonfiction as opposed to fiction, knowing that creative nonfiction requires a loyalty to truth that fiction does not?

Creative nonfiction is interesting because, like fiction, the writer must invoke the same dramatic structure of exposition, climax, and denouement. However, in creative nonfiction, the stories mentioned have already occurred. This intrigues me because the writer must convey the emotions of each scenario while being authentic to the story being told. That's why, when I reviewed MGC1056's piece, I looked less at the events themselves to construct my critique. Instead, I looked more at the story elements and the literary devices and techniques they used, whether intentionally or subconsciously. That's what fascinates me about reviewing creative nonfiction; the question for the writer is not necessarily, "Is the plot intriguing?" although that is essential to the piece. The more central question is: "How do you make the story feel real?" That, in my opinion, is a question more integral to reviewing creative nonfiction.

Guest Judge Tasha Faruqi appreciated your use of the word "ethereal," saying that it "captured the essence of the writing beautifully." How do you find the right vocabulary when celebrating or critiquing a piece?

...One thing I've learned the hard way is that, when writing for an audience, you must write on their level of comprehension, not your own. That thought goes both ways. It's okay to use higher-level vocabulary only if it doesn't overwhelm the reader. I'm so glad that Guest Judge Tasha Faruqi appreciated my professional and warm tone in my review because that's how I want people to perceive me. I'm thankful that she saw the authenticity in my voice and commended my flavor of personality!



Andrew Santillana
Age 17
Philippines

TEACHING RESOURCE

Memoir Writing Activities for Grades 6-12

“I cannot always control what goes on outside,” wrote Dr. Wayne Dyer, “but I can control what goes on inside.”

Memoir is, in essence, an act of creative control.

Teaching memoir is a wonderful way to meet US Common Core State Standards for narrative writing, scaffold students’ college essay writing, and/or teach metacognitive skills. When students reflect on their identities and experiences, they engage in meaning-making that can shape their lives long after a single writing assignment. To get started, try out the activities and strategies below.

1. Begin with “I Am From” Poems

Teachers often use George Ella Lyon’s “Where I’m From” poem as a mentor text to inspire students to think about their lived experiences, origins, and intersecting identities. Its brevity invites students to think about sensory details and concrete nouns that shape and/or represent who they are. Scaffold memoir writing by inviting students to first engage in this creative poetry activity. What sounds, shapes, smells, tastes, landscapes, or activities illuminate their lives? Once they’ve written their poems (and, optionally, participated in a class open mic to share them and identify connections and differences), engage in a whole-class discussion about how to transfer these craft elements to the memoir genre by building stanzas into scenes.



2. Make Positionality Maps

To harness multimodality—a key tenet of Universal Design for Learning—invite students to create Identity Charts to map the myriad facets of who they are, where they come from, and what is important to them. Students can consider many identity categories as they create: their physical and cultural identifiers; activities and hobbies; geographic origins and ancestry; values and beliefs; personality traits; strengths and areas for growth; memories and future goals; and more. Use this opportunity to introduce the term “intersectionality” and invite students to consider how their identifiers intersect and/or how some become more salient in certain environments.

TEACHING RESOURCE CONT.

3. Galvanize Connection through Gallery Walks

Once students have completed the Identity Map activity above, invite them to engage in a Gallery Walk activity in which they create an “identity museum,” posting their maps around the room or in a virtual folder.

As they circulate through the gallery, invite them to write responses to at least 3 students’ works (you might tape chart paper alongside each student’s identity map station to facilitate this response process). Ask them to share appreciations and make connections between and across identity maps. This activity can scaffold deeper discourse about self-reflection, metacognition, perspective-taking, and classroom culture.

Of course, given the personal nature of this exercise, sharing/posting should always be optional. Invite students to keep their map(s) handy when starting their memoir draft, using each node as inspiration for developing scenes, backstory, and foreshadowing in their memoir excerpt.

4. Scaffold Authentic Voice

“Any memoirist’s false selves (plural) will take turns plastering themselves across his real mouth to silence the scarier fact of who he is,” writes author Mary Karr in The Art of Memoir, “...False choices based on who you wish you were will result in places where the voice goes awry or the details chosen ring false.”

Memoir opens up a compelling opportunity to examine voice, tone, and the construction of the self in writing. Invite students to consider and critique the theme of truth in memoir writing by using the Personal Narrative Sample Openings linked in Write the World’s memoir writing competition resources. What voices and tones do students notice authors using? Which feels most engaging, and why? Which seems most truthful, and why? How do students know when they are writing authentically—when they are crafting prose both beautiful and true, versus protecting their appearance on the page?

Using these texts, facilitate a Think, Pair, Share (see 16 adaptations on this discussion format here), then a whole group Socratic discussion on these themes, topics, and texts.



Looking for more resources? Download the free [memoir lesson plan](#), made possible by the Wayne Dyer Family Foundation.

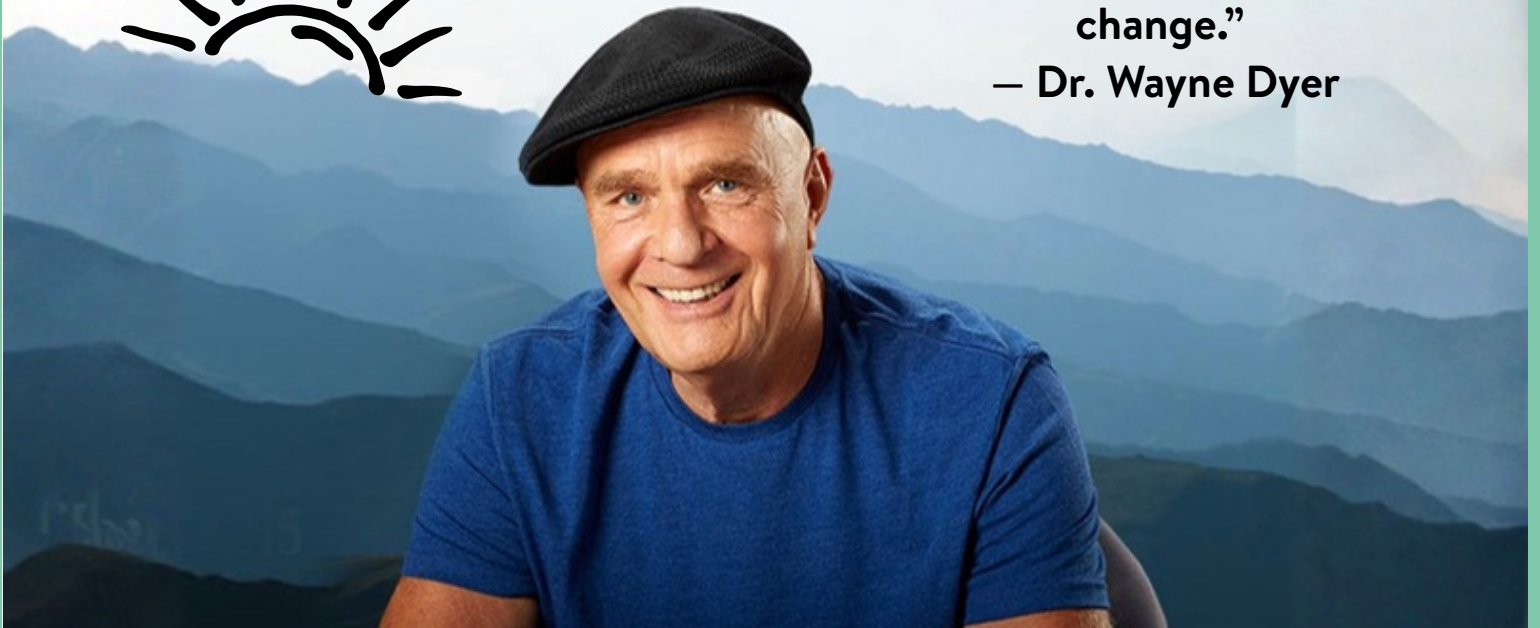
Questions? Feedback?

Reach out to educators@writetheworld.org



**"If you change the way you look
at things, the things you look at
change."**

— Dr. Wayne Dyer



**Thank you to the Wayne Dyer Family Foundation for making
this content possible.**

The Wayne Dyer Family Foundation is a family-run nonprofit dedicated to carrying forward Wayne Dyer's legacy by supporting education, opportunity, and personal growth.



Wayne Walter Dyer (1940–2015) was an American writer, psychologist, and one of the most influential voices in modern self-help. His breakout book, *Your Erroneous Zones* (1976), became one of the best-selling self-help titles of all time. Through his focus on self-responsibility, motivation, assertiveness, and self-actualization, he helped millions recognize that personal growth is something they can actively shape.

His legacy continues to inspire new generations of writers, thinkers, and change-makers.



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Write the World Review is an online journal showcasing a diverse and international range of work from our young writers on Write the World. It includes journalism, poetry, short fiction, personal narrative and reflection, film and book reviews, and much more. If you are 13-19, we welcome your submissions on our vibrant online community where young writers can draft and publish work, respond to weekly prompts in a variety of genres, exchange feedback, and enter monthly competitions.

As a 501(c)3 nonprofit, Write the World also offers writing workshops, college essay writing support, and resources for teachers to create engaging writing communities within their classroom. Our mission is to equip teenagers with the confidence and competence to change the world, one word at a time. By developing teenagers' writing and critical thinking skills, we empower young writers to become global citizens and succeed in school, career, and life.

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