**Interpretation of Literature 8G:1/Smith**

**Assignment Sheet: Autobiography of a Reader**

In a brief essay that combines **narration** and **reflection**, introduce yourself to me in an **autobiography of a reader—**a picture of the type of reader you are.

Your autobiography might discuss your **history** as a reader, your biggest **influence(s)** as a reader, **important moments** or **strong memories** you have of reading, or **what “literacy” means** to you. You might choose to write about your earliest, most important, or most positive *or* negative memory of reading; an example that brings to life the most difficult or rewarding aspect of reading and writing; or an event or person that shaped your current outlook on reading and writing, or on yourself as a reader. Make sure that your narrative covers a span of time—I’m interested in where you are now, but also in how you got here, so tell me a bit about your past as a reader.

On the back of this sheet you will find a list of questions to help you get started. You certainly are not expected to address all of them – pick just a few that you can relate to.

You can format your autobiography as creatively as you wish—do whatever suits the narrative you have in mind. You received a copy of Sherman Alexie’s “Superman and Me,” which is just one example of an autobiography of a reader.[[1]](#footnote-1) However, this is not a research assignment, and you are not required to look at or use any outside examples.

This is a relatively short assignment, because I want you to have time to settle in and spend focused time crafting it. You should be prepared to work slowly, think carefully, and take your essay through a couple of rounds of drafting and revision. **The final draft should be 500-700 words (2-3 pages) and should be presented in 12 pt. font, with 1-inch margins and double spacing, and using proper MLA format.** An example of MLA format is attached to this assignment sheet.

A strong essay will tackle its topic in a way that includes:

* Good awareness of your audience.
* Vivid description. Don't be afraid to use “I”—after all, this is your own narrative about yourself. Include relevant, reflective details to enrich the scenes you describe.
* Well-written, technically skilled narration. During the early stages of the essay, just worry about getting your thoughts on the page. Eventually, however, you should start re-reading for polish.
* A strong focus on your topic, including thoughtful reflection on the larger significance of the event(s) or moment(s) you discuss. Why did you choose this particular event or idea to discuss? What does it mean to you, and what makes it important? What should the reader take away from your piece?

**Consider the following questions as you write:**

*You certainly do not have to address all of these – pick the ones that you can relate to. You should, however, make sure that at some point in your paper you share a bit about your early, middle, and current reading history/preferences. In other words, I do want to see a bit about your past with reading as well as where you are now as a reader.*

* What are your **earliest memories** of learning to read or being read to? Are they at home or during your very early schooling? Did it come easily or was it difficult?
* What were/are some **favorite children’s books** you read (or had read to you)? What are some of your ***least* favorite** **children’s books**? Why did you like/dislike these?
* What were your reading habits like as you got older and moved through elementary and then middle and high school? Were there any series of books you read? Any magazines you read regularly?
* Consider your **required school reading** throughout the years. Were there any books you found you really liked? What about them did you like? Were there any you couldn’t stand? What about them did you not like? Were there any that you tolerated but later found you were glad to have read? Explain.
* What are your **current reading habits**? Besides reading required for college, what do you read? Novels? Non-fiction books? Blogs? Online magazines and newspapers? Comic books?
* What are your **reading preferences**? Do you have favorite genres of books (mystery, autobiographies, self-help, romances, etc.)? Why is this your preference? What about these books grabs your attention?
* What do you think really makes a **“good”** book? (or play, or poem, or article, etc.)
* What is your **current view of reading** (you can be honest here). Do you see value in it? Why or why not? You can also include in here any current struggles with reading.
* What are your **current reading goals** for yourself? Are they academic in nature? Are they more related to hobby reading?
* Idea: spend a few minutes looking up quotes about reading on the Internet or from a book. Which quote(s) about reading resonate with where you are as a reader or your history of reading? Why?

1. If you become interested in the form, you might wish to check out portions of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X, The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* Michael Awkward’s *Scenes of Instruction,* the introduction to Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird,* and even the ambivalent accounts of literacy in portions of *The Book of Margery Kempe*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)