# Creative Non-fiction Unit

**ACCP Honors English IV**  
**Mary Patricia Storms, M.A.**

## INTRODUCTION

### What is Creative Nonfiction?

Creative Non-fiction is an emerging genre of writing that integrates personal and global experience in prose or poetry. Creative non-fiction is rooted in truth rather than imagination, utilizes research and factual evidence along with the personal experience and expertise of the writer. Memoir, essay, literary journalism and poetry are common forms of creative non-fiction.

Creative Non-fiction ideally shows, rather than tells. It invites the reader to see the world through the lens of the author's experience and in doing so expand one's own worldview and self-understanding.

The writer of Creative Non-fiction is required to analyze, interpret, explain and synthesize his/her own experiences with accurate, thoroughly researched data.

## RATIONALE

### Why teach Creative Non-fiction?

Creative Non-fiction provides an opportunity for students to develop voice and to enter – through writing – into dialogue within the academic community. This process sharpens critical thinking skills, utilizes meaningful content and encourages the development of personal and professional ethical standards in writing.

## OBJECTIVES

As a result of this unit, students will demonstrate:

- Specific, detailed, concrete descriptive writing;
- Developed characterization;
- Sophistication in use of dialogue;
- Appropriate, non-clichéd use of image and metaphor;
- Development of personal and professional ethical guidelines;
- Use of personal memories to illustrate universal experiences or truths;
- Understanding of the validity of voice

## RESOURCES

Used in the development of this unit

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### MORE RESOURCES

**Suggested Resources**

- *Mental Floss Magazine*; www.metalfloss.com

## DAY ONE

### Introduction to Creative Non-fiction

- Rooted in truth, not imagination
- Experience plus research
- Illuminating data with your voice
- Drawing the line: getting the reader to trust you.
- Truth v. truth

### Examples of Creative Non-fiction

- McCourt, Frank: *Angela’s Ashes*
- Didion, Joan: “The Santa Ana”
- Duncan, David: “The Mickey Mantle Koan”
- Price, Jennifer: *A Brief Natural History of the Plastic Pink Flamingo*
- Dillard, Annie: “The Chase”

### Brainstorming Exercise: Other than the Pink Plastic Flamingo, what are some common cultural icons?
Create a class list, then identify research possibilities.

### Homework:
Read one of the essays listed, or a selection from *Angela’s Ashes*; identify elements that make it Creative Non-fiction.

## DAY TWO

### Opening Activity: Imagine that you do not have your homework completed for today’s class. In a paragraph, create an effective, persuasive excuse.

### Discussion:
In your writing you have created scene – specific, definite, concrete detail that allows the reader to enter into the experience of the writer. It appeals to the senses.

### Looking at student writing:
How does your writing appeal to the senses? What details help the reader understand/be persuaded to accept your excuse?

### Homework:
Write a paragraph describing a place you spend time at each day. Bring a photo of yourself with one or more family members.

## DAY THREE

### Opening activity: Describe what is happening in the photo you brought to class.

### Discussion:
The story you have told about the photo is true, but it is only a portion of the truth. What else is happening at the time the photo is taken that does not appear in the photo? Who was there? Who is missing? Is
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| there a significance to who is not in the photo?  
| Creative Non-fiction works with Permutations of Truth: memory, imagination, emotion and fact are all engaged.  
| What other voices could tell about the photo? How might their stories differ from yours?  
| Activity: Ernest Hemingway was once asked to write a six-word story. He wrote: “For sale: Baby shoes. Never worn.” Playing from this, Smith Magazine organized a six-word memoir contest last year. (Provide some examples – in appendix) In carefully choosing six words, you can give the reader a snapshot of a portion of life.  
| Homework: create a six-word memoir for one of the characters/authors you encountered in your summer reading, or for a famous person.  
| Homework: interview someone who can provide another voice about your photo. |

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### DAY FOUR

**Opening activity:** your own six-word memoir  
**Dialogue:** writing to avoid Information Dumping, tag lines, “feelings” words  
**In-class:** re-create conversation that happened when class was interrupted. (Previously planned and staged interruption.) Group writing.  
**If time permits, have a six-word memoir reading.**  
**Homework:** Create six lines of dialogue between your parents, or between one parent and another adult encapsulating a commonly heard argument.

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### DAY FIVE

**Opening Activity:** Identify a social ill that you find personally troubling, describing the ill and why you find it disturbing.  
**Emotional truth v. factual truth:** what do you choose to leave out? Creative Non-fiction relies on trust between reader and writer. Deciding where to draw the line. Permutations of truth.  
**“The Golf Links” - social commentary**  

“I Hear America Singing” by Walt Whitman; “I, Too, Sing America” by Langston Hughes – whose view is true? (Denzel Washington recites this in The Great Debaters)  
**Homework:** Imitation writing – Golf Links and America: who are you?
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### DAY SIX

**Opening Activity:** earliest childhood memory

Memory – whose is valid? How many voices are there?  
Metaphorical Memory – a truth is revealed through a watershed experience  
Muscle Memory: how does your body connect you to past or future – scars? Sensory memory – smell, taste, hearing, touch, sight: Challah story (Brenda Miller).

**Homework:** Two-voice memory – write about a memory using alternating voices-

### DAY SEVEN

**Opening Activity:** Write the story of the first Christmas.

Compare writings with Matthew and Luke versions – example of compressing time: taking several events and recalling them in a single memory.

**Brainstorming:** ideas for compressed time writings

**Homework:** choose one of the ideas brainstormed in class and write a paragraph about it in compressed time.

### DAY EIGHT

**Opening activity:** Describe what you recall doing when you learned of a major historical event that has occurred during your lifetime – some examples: 9-11; Virginia Tech, Katrina, Red Sox winning the World Series, Tsunami, Space Shuttle Columbia, Papal Election; Tiger Slam, Bush elected.

**Discussion:** Creative Non-fiction can provide historical and cultural insight. By providing an ontological layer (connecting your experience to a larger, fundamental truth which may be abstract) to your writing, you can offer a lasting artifact of an important historical event, or can provide insight into cultural values and practices (much as pioneer diaries do).

**Activity:** group students by event and invite them to share memories/reactions to particular events. How are their stories similar and distinct? In sharing stories, what is missing?

**Homework:** Research the facts related to the event you described, and interview at least two other people about their memories of/ reactions to the event. Try to interview people who are not peers.
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### DAY NINE

**Opening Activity:** Review your collection of writings for this unit.

Today is a Writer’s Workshop Day: you will choose one of the writings you have done to expand into a full length essay, and create a version in class.

**Homework:** Do whatever research you think is needed to complete your essay. Remember that Creative Non-fiction always includes documented data. Rewrite your essay to include your data. Completed essays are due Monday.

### DAY TEN

**Opening Activity:** Read through *Metal Floss* issues (provided)

**Discussion:** Is *Mental Floss* Creative Non-fiction? Why? Why not? How could this publication help writers?

**Brainstorming:** Using the issue of *Mental Floss*, create a list of potential topics for future essays, and record data that could be used in the essays.

### OTHER CREATIVE NON-FICTION PROMPTS

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<tr>
<th>Prompt</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Life before You</strong></td>
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<td>• Think of a family member you know well who is at least 10 years older than you. Imagine the life of the person before you were born. What was he/she like? What photos, documents, stories help you “know” the person before you “knew” the person?</td>
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<td><strong>101 Most Influential People Who Never Lived</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Barbie, Santa Claus, James Bond, Spiderman, Atticus Finch – all icons that embody values and insight into our culture. Who is the most important person who never lived to you? Why? How?</td>
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<td><strong>Natural Science</strong></td>
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<td>• Alligators, rabbits, flamingos, snowflakes, glaciers – our world is filled with creatures and natural wonders that inspire, frighten or fascinate humans. Identify something in the natural world that intrigues, perplexes or repels you.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family Legend</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Every family has stories that are handed through generations as treasures – the night Frank Sinatra danced with Grandma or Uncle Billy died at Pearl Harbor. Identify a family story, then research the historical data and record it in writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Travel</strong></td>
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<td>• Where have you traveled? Where would you like to go? Combine research and experience to produce advice for tourists.</td>
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