Analyze the Features of a Memoir

1. Focus

Explain Genre Features

Say: Every genre of writing has features, or characteristics, that readers can expect to find in that type of text. Today we’re going to identify examples of those features that you expect to find in a memoir.

Build a Class Genre Features Anchor Chart

Say: You’ve read memoirs here in class and possibly on your own, so you’ve already encountered features of the genre. Think about what you already know about memoirs as we identify and list the features in an anchor chart.

Display a blank chart like one shown here on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Also distribute copies of the chart to students on BLM 1. Work with students to record features of memoirs in the left column. (Students will complete the right column later in the lesson.) If necessary, use the following prompts to guide students:

- Who tells the story of a memoir?
- How much of the writer’s life does a memoir focus on?
- What do authors reveal about themselves in memoirs?
- What does the author include in a memoir to show the characters’ important thoughts and feelings?
- How does the author describe past events in a memoir?
- What form does a memoir take that makes it lively and engaging?
- How does a memoir usually end?

Memoir Features examples from the text

First person point of view Narrator is the writer. He uses the pronouns I, me, my, and we throughout.

Focuses on a short period of time or several related events in the writer’s life This memoir focuses on the series of related events that happened to the writer after he graduated from high school.

Includes writer’s thoughts and feelings page 23: “Of course, I am deeply disappointed . . .” page 25: “It’s more than a thrill, more than a rush. It’s bliss.”

Includes dialogue page 24: The writer includes dialogue to show his pride at finding the exam easy.

Focuses on events the way the writer remembers them page 25: The important part of this memory—looking down on the instructor before jumping—is what the writer tells.

Written in narrative form page 24: The writer describes the Special Forces officer with all the detail of a story.

Includes a strong ending that makes the reader think page 26: The writer has been leading up to this moment, leaving the reader imagining him in Vietnam and at war.

Sample Memoir Features Anchor Chart (BLM 1)
**2. Rehearse**

### Analyze the Mentor Text

Form small groups of students to complete the second column of the graphic organizer on BLM 1. If you are using the interactive whiteboard resources, invite students to revisit parts of the text at the interactive whiteboard as they look for the examples they need.

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

### Share Ideas

Bring students together and invite volunteers to share the examples they found in the text you read aloud. Record their findings on your anchor chart. Post this anchor chart for students to refer to throughout the unit as they think about the memoir features they need to include in their memoirs.

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**3. Independent Writing and Conferring**

**Say:** As you write your own memoirs, refer to the anchor chart to see how each feature functions in a memoir. You can see how the writer of “What Comes Before Wings” includes each feature, and you can use the same features in your writing.

Ask students to continue brainstorming ideas for their memoirs. To explore an important feature of memoirs, you may also wish to have them write a paragraph in which they describe their thoughts and feelings about an event in their past.

### 4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to report on their brainstorming progress and/or to read aloud paragraphs describing their thoughts and feelings about a past time in their lives.

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**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning**

Pair beginning ELs with fluent English speakers during the small-group activity. Keep in mind that they will not be able to contribute many ideas. You may want to work with them individually to reinforce concepts while other students write independently.

**Intermediate**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the small-group activity. Write the following simple sentence frames on chart paper and model how students can use them to contribute ideas in the group. For example:

- The narrator of the memoir is ______. I know this because ______.
- The writer shares feelings when ______.
- The writer uses dialogue when he writes ______.
- The end of the memoir made me think because ______.

**Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the small-group activity.