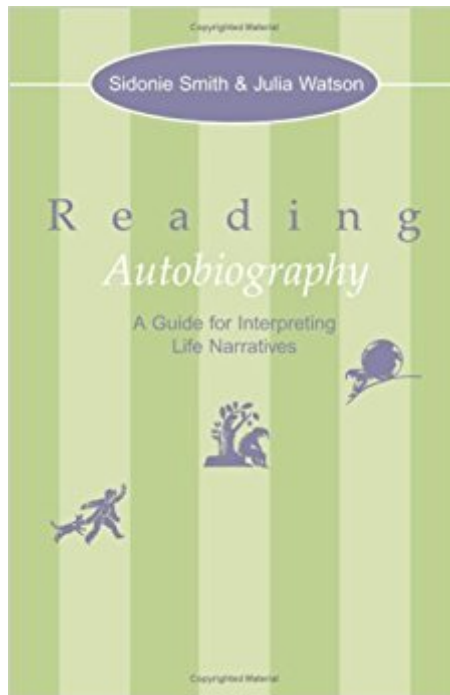




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Reading Autobiography: A Guide For Interpreting Life Narratives



Synopsis

Autobiographical writing is redefining the meaning of narrative, as the recent explosion of memoirs by writers such as Frank McCourt, Mary Karr, Dave Eggers, and Kathryn Harrison suggests. But what's involved in bringing these narratives into the classroom—in creative writing, cultural studies, women's and ethnic studies, and social science and literature courses? How may instructors engage the philosophical, historical, social, and theoretical contexts of the emerging field of autobiography studies? Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, two authorities in the field, distill their diverse forays into life writing in a concise yet far-reaching overview of key terms, issues, histories, and texts in autobiography studies. *Reading Autobiography* is a step-by-step introduction to the differences of autobiography from fiction and biography; the components of autobiographical acts; such core concepts as memory, experience, identity, agency, and the body; the textual and critical history of the field; and prospects for future research. Organized as a user-friendly handbook, it includes a glossary of keywords, suggestions for teaching, and extensive primary and secondary bibliographies. Sidonie Smith is professor of English and director of women's studies at the University of Michigan. Julia Watson is associate professor of comparative studies at Ohio State University.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is a hybrid, meant for both undergraduates and graduate students. I used it for an undergraduate, upper division course on autobiography. Some chapters were useful in teaching undergraduates ("A Toolkit"; "In the Wake of the Memoir Boom"); some chapters, although containing useful information ("Autobiographical Subjects"; "Autobiographical Acts") were written in the undecipherable and unnecessarily complicated jargon of literary critical theory. I found off-putting and grew impatient with the obligatory genuflection to the political orthodoxy that characterizes much post-structuralist literary criticism. There are also many instances of readings in miniature of specific memoirs, most of them not particularly enlightening to the critical idea, more as an example of a type. What I found myself wishing I could do is to give my students a redacted version of this book, one in which I had cut out all the dross and and the jargon. Grad students who have been taught or forced to embrace the jargon and who find themselves either elevated by using it or needing to genuflect to their professors' requiring their use of it would probably find this more satisfying than I did.

Excellent analysis of the autobiographical genre and a joy to read. I live the classifications and the arguments supporting them are interesting and logical. A must have together with Philippe Lejeune for anyone interested in writing a thesis or a dissertation on the matter!

I suppose for a graduate level class, this book may be appropriate. For the most part, I could not even follow along. The authors use autobiographies as illustrations to teach autobiographical concepts. This is flawed logic. For an illustration to be effective, there must be an assumption that the student has some knowledge - this is not the case for my class. In addition to referencing outside works to illustrate concepts, the authors pride themselves on including as many words as possible. I believe the average opening sentence in each paragraph has at least 4 clauses. Another reviewer pointed out that it was great for their doctorate course - that may be appropriate. For my undergraduate class, this book was overkill.

I used this book for my Graduate Program as the thesis of my final research paper. It does a great job of making you feel that you are able to understand the theory of life narratives and their affects

on all aspects of society. A must have for grad students looking for a unique theory.

this is a an excellent reference book for anyone interested in studying autobiography. Smith and Watson explain thoroughly the aspects of autobiographical narratives. i recommend buying it.

Most of the language used in this book is difficult to follow if you are not really interested in learning about how to interpret autobiographies. If you are looking for just a quick read this is not the book for you. However it is very insightful in learning how to understand the hows and whys of autobiographies...Great pick for material for college class on war stories.

Ordered for a class.

The book itself is fine. The Kindle edition, however, is very poorly formatted and contains many errors. I recommend buying the physical book.

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