



Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives

Sidonie Smith

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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.

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