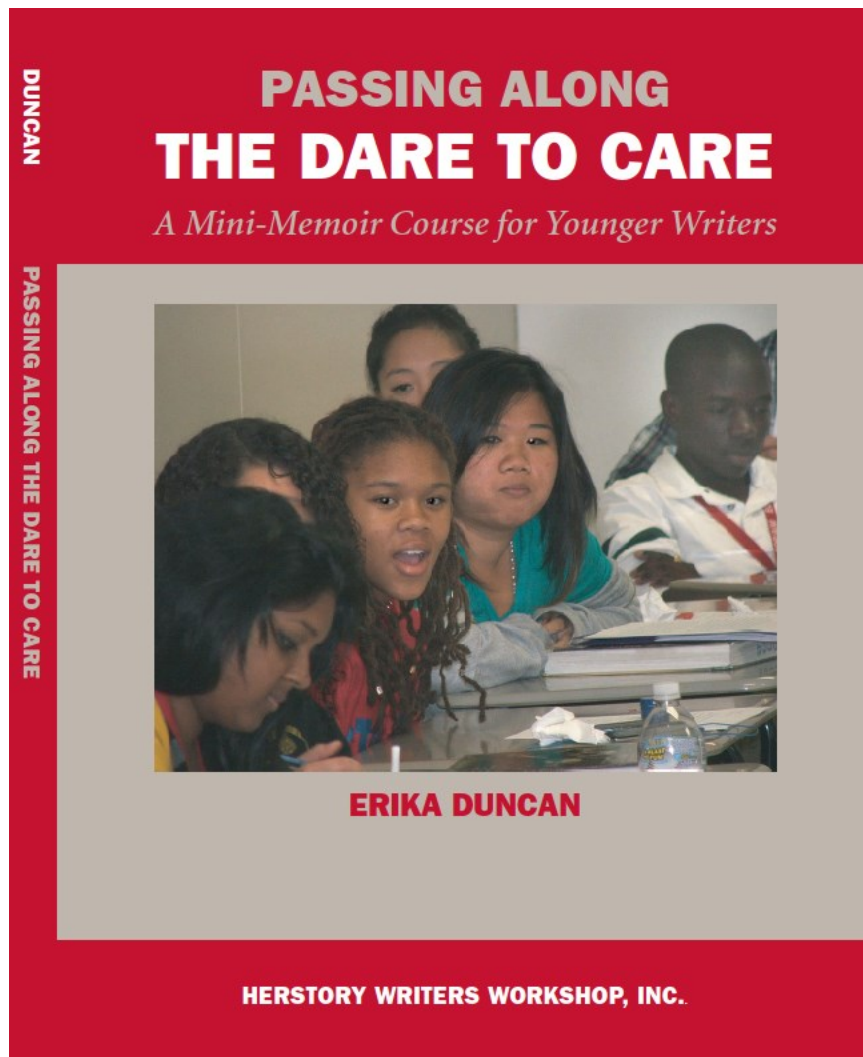


Teaching the Page One Moment in Summary

An excerpt from Herstory's manual, *Passing Along the Dare to Care*, originally designed for students transitioning from high school to college, now used widely in all of our Herstory workshops.



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APPENDIX

Teaching the Page One Moment (the essentials in summary)

TEACHING THE PAGE ONE EXERCISES

1. Set up the idea of writing for the “Stranger/Reader” walking in on any moment of one’s life.¹
2. Explain that you will be working with two basic questions:
 - ▶ Where would you like the Stranger/Reader to meet you on your Imaginary Page One?
 - ▶ How will you be able to get that Stranger/Reader to care about what is happening particularly to you?
3. Model a small Chinese menu of fertile Page One meetings
 - ▶ In a variety of periods in a lifetime:
 - ▷ One or two out of early childhood
 - ▷ One or two out of adolescence or coming-of-age
 - ▷ One or two turning points in later adulthood
 - ▶ In a variety of tonal compositions:
 - ▷ Joy/triumph
 - ▷ Pain/loss
 - ▷ Stillness/reverie
 - ▷ High drama/packed with action
 - ▶ In a variety of narrative treatments:
 - ▷ Chronological—moving forward
 - From the voice of that moment

¹ This Page One Exercise must be repeated in full, even if there is only one newcomer in the group; however, it can be drastically abbreviated by having each member of the ongoing group introduce herself with her Page One while you cover the various points I have outlined in my Chinese menu. Once the introductions have been completed, you can take your new student/students quickly through play-acting their Page Ones, then conduct the workshop as usual with readings out of ongoing projects, returning at the end to the new students’ plans of action and permission to write badly.

- From the voice of the one doing the remembering
 - Jumping back and forth in time
4. Help each newcomer to play-act one or two openings, testing each one for
 - ▶ Strength in engaging a Stranger/Reader in that chosen moment
 - ▶ Dramatic offshoots that will allow it to move forward
 - ▶ Possibilities in terms of each writer's comfort zone
 - ▶ Relationship to the larger story that each writer wishes to tell
 5. Explain the nature of slowing down into the opening of one's choice.
 6. Make sure each newcomer leaves with a Page One plan of action.
 - ▶ If time allows, go quickly around the room a second time to review how each newcomer will structure her opening.
 7. Finally, extend the "courage to write badly."
 - ▶ Encourage everyone to bring all of the drafts they generate so that the notion of a workshop will be real.

Concepts to Be Introduced on Day One

- ▶ The Stranger/Reader
- ▶ The Imaginary Page One
- ▶ Book Time
- ▶ "There-ness" as opposed to "About-ness"

Please refer to the glossary if you need extra help in explaining these concepts.

Review for Facilitators

Ideally your goal will be to have each newcomer tell her scene so vividly that the others in the room will not be able to wait for the next working session to see where that scene might go. By the end of the first working session, you will have been able to image not one, but a multitude of possible next steps, based on what was offered: steps to take the reader backward into a memory contained within a memory; steps to take the reader into the next stage of whatever drama has begun to unfold.

Remember to let your mind wander, as you go around the room listening to each person's story, as one person will give so much detail you will be unable to follow, while the next one will offer so little, you won't know where to begin.

Do let your mind wander. Its wandering will be your source of clues as to when the narrative went off. You will snap to attention the minute that the story calls you. What called you back, you will find, often resonated for the others as well, even if it was spoken in a rush, mired in a lot of peripheral material.

Before you lose the story fragment's shape, draw an outline around it, first in your mind, while you are actually listening, and then later out loud, when your speaker has come to a stopping place, so that other group members can go back to it and work with it.

Invite the group to play around with those strong moments, finding as many ways to use them as springboards for the story of the person who is speaking, all the while reminding the group that the decision as to how or whether to use it is really the speaker's alone.

If you make it clear that your play with the materials offered is only to inspire and not to impose shapes, you can relax into rearranging the narrative pieces into one rapid tableau after another, offering each one as a possibility to the speaker, but assuming that later, when she gets home, at a moment in the shower, she will come up with a new tableau, inspired by the examples, but entirely her own.

Working with the Group

To keep our blank slate effect:

1. Discourage students from answering and asking those reality questions that will destroy the use of the group to play-act the Stranger/Reader who does not yet know what will happen.
2. Explain how the mystery of the work unfolding on the page will be broken by answers to well-meaning questions such as:
 - ▶ How did your brother die?
 - ▶ Was he a baby or already a grown-up?
 - ▶ Did you end up keeping the child?
 - ▶ What did you do that landed you in prison?
3. Explain how admitting only information that came from the writer's own framing of her opening page and direction will protect
 - ▶ The privacy of the writer until she is ready to tell more
 - ▶ The integrity of the story being written so that the creation of suspense/concern can be real

Structure and “The Herstory Bill of Rights”

While we avoid the sort of exercises common in many memoir writing workshops (such as: “Write of an experience of sadness or joy, or a moment that changed your life”), we have our own kind of structure in that:

1. We take for granted that some ways of telling stories are more effective than others.
2. We take for granted that where each workshop member begins and how well she understands the principles of framing a story will have a profound effect on the success of the endeavor.
3. We take for granted that there is no single correct way of telling any story.
 - ▶ For each new participant, the writing journey will be different. The facilitator must work on level ground with each participant to help her find her particular best way.
4. We must respect the fact that the wish to share private facts, thoughts and experiences with a Stranger/Reader is complicated and fraught with contradictions.
 - ▶ The invitation to share intimate truths can feel like a betrayal, if that sharing is not met with a response that is genuine and full.
 - ▶ Conversely, if stories are told in a way that is half-hearted or anxiously overwhelming, the Listener/Reader cannot be brought in with caring, unless she (through you as the facilitator) can be helped into a more effective way of telling.
5. We must help each new member to experience her own reasons for self revelation, while working out a storytelling structure around what is essential in her wish “to tell.”
 - ▶ Simultaneously we must work to protect those parts of her that she wishes to keep silent.