

STUDENT HANDOUT · UNIT III · MEMOIR



Session 9

The Double Structure — What Happened, What It Means

Sunday, July 12, 2026 · 4:00–5:30 PM · The Community Room

Student handout · readings · in-class practice · discussion questions · homework · worksheet

The Art of Telling

A free creative-writing salon for residents of 2601

Led by James F. Mulhern · Silver Current Press

Welcome to the Session 9 companion handout for *The Double Structure — What Happened, What It Means*. This is your take-home guide for today's salon — it gathers the main points of the lesson, the readings for class, the in-class practice, the discussion questions with room to write your own thoughts, this week's homework, and the Double Voice Worksheet for your private notebook. For the full session materials, reading companions, and course updates, visit companion.art-of-telling.com.

Main Points of the Lesson

The hardest skill in memoir is the *double voice*: the younger self living through the experience, and the older self looking back at it. The younger voice supplies the texture, the immediacy, the not-yet-knowing. The older voice supplies the reflection, the pattern, the meaning the younger self could not yet see. These two voices speak together on the page. The choice of how much to withhold the older voice is the craft. Antin lets it in early; Washington almost never lets it in. Both are legitimate.

Readings for Class

- Mary Antin, opening chapter of *The Promised Land* (1912) — [Project Gutenberg \(public domain\)](#). An immigrant memoir where the older voice and the younger voice speak openly together — a foundational example of the form modern memoirists have inherited.
- Booker T. Washington, opening chapter of *Up from Slavery* (1901) — [Project Gutenberg \(public domain\)](#). The opposite craft move: the older voice almost entirely withheld, the boy's experience left to do its own work.

Washington's opening, from the live text — “*I was born a slave on a plantation in Franklin County, Virginia. I am not quite sure of the exact place or exact date of my birth, but at any rate I suspect I must have been born somewhere and at some time.*” Notice how steady the older voice is here — observational, almost detached, holding back any reflection it does not need. We will compare this restraint to the very different opening of Mary Antin.

Critical Reception (after our discussion)

Open these only after you've formed your own response.

- [Library of America on Mary Antin](#) — on the place of *The Promised Land* in American letters.
- [National Park Service on Up from Slavery](#) — historical context and critical reading.

In-Class Practice

From the live site

Take a paragraph you wrote in Session 8. Mark every sentence as Y (younger voice) or O (older, reflective voice). Where could you let one come forward? Where could you let the other go quiet?

stays in your notebook. Two or three volunteers may report what the Y/O marking showed them about the paragraph — in general terms, without reading the paragraph itself, unless they want to. Nothing collected.

Discussion Questions

Use the space below each question to write your own thoughts before or during our discussion. Nothing here is collected.

Q1. In the opening of *The Promised Land*, where is the older voice? Where is the younger voice?

Q2. In Washington, what does it mean that the older voice is almost entirely withheld? What is the effect on the reader?

Q3. In your own memoir writing, which voice tends to come forward first — younger or older? What happens when you let the other in?

Homework

The read

Read Sherwood Anderson's *Death in the Woods* — [full text \(public domain\)](#). It is a short story, not a memoir, but it explicitly performs revision: the narrator tells the same story twice. Read all the way through.

The optional exercise

Optional: mark a memoir paragraph of your own Y/O, using the Double Voice Worksheet at the end of this handout.

Before Next Sunday — Session 10

Revision — How Writers Actually Re-See. Our last full session. We will look at the difference between editing (fixing sentences) and revision (re-seeing the whole), and we will try, in the room, the discipline of cutting a page of our own writing by 25 percent and then another 25 percent — and seeing what survives.

Double Voice Worksheet

From the live site

Copy into a Word document. Apply to a memoir paragraph of your own. This stays in your private notebook — never collected, never read aloud unless you choose.

1. Paste a memoir paragraph here.
2. Mark each sentence Y (younger voice, lived experience) or O (older voice, reflection).
3. What does the older voice supply that the younger could not?

4. What does the younger voice supply that the older could not?

5. One sentence I could rewrite in the opposite voice: _____

Closing Note

Because there wasn't time to tell everything, the companion site — companion.art-of-telling.com — gathers session materials, reading companions, and course updates so residents can follow along and review after each Sunday.