Note to Teachers/Parents

Legend has it that when Ernest Hemingway was challenged to write a six-word novel, he came up with, “For Sale: baby shoes, never worn.” Inspired by Hemingway’s short story, SMITH magazine launched online in 2006. They challenged readers and famous writers alike to submit their own six-word memoirs for a contest. People of all ages sent in short life stories in droves, and the results were poignant, hilarious, devastating and good lessons to all.

This teachers guide was created to help educators integrate the six-word memoir project into their own classrooms. As you read through the guide, you will discover how to use Six Word Memoirs as a powerful educational tool to ignite creativity and critical thinking in your classroom, as well as give students a voice to tell their life stories.

Why my classroom?

To understand the impact that six-word memoirs have had on classrooms around the country, here are some teacher/student testimonials:

“Six-Word Memoirs taught us a lot about our students and also taught the kids that efficiency of language can be a powerful way to make a point or share something poignant about themselves.” - Jenny Platow, teacher at Essex Street Academy in New York City, New York

“It was a way to express themselves without writing a long narrative that may not speak to the reader as strongly as their Six Word Memoir. Above all, they thought hard about their word choice, punctuation, and how they could illustrate the emotion/ tone they wanted to express.” - Ginger Giessler, teacher at New Tech Academy in Fort Wayne, Indiana

“It is said that you can learn a lot about a person by the contents of a purse or wallet. I’ve learned more by seeing what people can say in six words.” - Eric K., student at Ridgeview High School in Orange Park, Florida

Setting Student Expectations

As teachers, we know that it is essential to set goals and expectations for our students before starting any new unit or project. In order to make your Six-Word Memoir project a meaningful and purposeful experience, here are 6 goals/expectations to set for your students before you begin.
1. Focus on purposeful and precise writing
2. Use Six-Word Memoirs to improve reading skills
3. Use Six-Word Memoirs to practice working through the writing process
4. Engage in conversation around thought-provoking writing pieces
5. Share your life story in a creative, innovative and meaningful way
6. Think critically about the way you and others view the world

Six-Word Memoirs and The Common Core Standards

We understand the importance of aligning curriculum with common core standards. With this in mind, Six Words for Schools includes activities that promote the shifts in rigor in writing and analyzing texts.

CCLS ELA Anchor Standards for Reading and Writing

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2** Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3** Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.10** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Trying It Out

Before you begin using Six Word Memoirs with your students, we challenge you to write your own. Your Six Word Memoirs can be about your personal life, your teaching experience, or anything else for that matter. The most important thing is that it is personal, honest, and meaningful (Oh yeah…and it can only be six words).

________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________

Now for a homework assignment: Share your Six Word Memoir with a friend, family member or stranger. It doesn’t matter – as long as someone else in the world reads it or hears it.
Six Words for Schools and the Student Workbook

Now that you’ve written your own Six-Word Memoir, how do you get your students involved? The Student Workbook is designed to help support students as they embark on the journey of writing Six-Word Memoirs. This step-by-step workbook guides children through the writing process and challenges them to achieve higher-level thinking through multiple practices that develop their personal experiences into a powerful, creative message.

Students should personalize their Student Workbooks by completing the cover page with a personal photo. This way, each workbook will be unique to the student who completes it. Once students finish the first cycle of the Six Word Memoir process, they can complete the “Who am I, in Six Words” activity on page 27 in the Student Workbook. This can be used as a culminating activity, which will allow them to reintroduce themselves as the new accomplished author of their very own Six Word Memoir.

The Writing Process

Writing a Six-Word Memoir is just like writing any other piece. Walking your students through the writing process step-by-step is an excellent way to connect Six-Word Memoirs to everyday instruction and Common Core Learning Standards, as well as help students produce high-quality material.

Step 1: Expose
Pages 6-11 in Student Workbook

Although students may have experience writing personal essays or even memoirs, more than likely they have not delved into the Six-Word Memoir genre. To begin, explain to students that memoirs are a literary nonfiction genre much like an autobiography. However, unlike an autobiography, which tells a complete life story, a memoir tells a story from a life, such as one event or memory that helped shape them as a person. Introduce them to Six-Word Memoirs by sharing published examples by writers, celebrities and other students. Through these examples, they will begin to understand the possibility of using only six words to portray themselves to get their message across. Many of these examples will inspire students to think about and write their own stories.

For additional examples, visit http://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/schools

After reading through multiple examples, have students discuss the Six Word Memoir genre and what they took away from the writing. Here are some questions to help guide the conversation.
After reading the six-word memoirs, what surprises you about this form of writing? What can you learn from it to take into other types of writing?
- What were some of the common themes that emerged from the writing? Which themes stood out to you the most and why?
- What emotions are revealed through these six-word memoirs? Which words make you feel those emotions?
- Choose one of the six-word memoirs. What do you think is the backstory for this author’s six-word memoir?
- Why is storytelling important? Can your story change?
- How difficult do you think it is to capture the essence of who you are into six words?
- What difference do you see in the visual representations of the six-word memoirs you read? Why do you think some authors chose to include pictures?
- As a class, consider how punctuation affects the six-word memoir by choosing three and rewriting them changing only the punctuation. Discuss how this changes the meaning of the memoir.

Differentiation Strategies

1. Every teacher knows his/her own classroom best. You may decide to change the order of the expose activities or even substitute a memoir from the workbook with one from the website. Choose the three memoirs that would provide the best hook for your class and create the most meaningful discussions.

2. For overall vocabulary support and differentiation for English Language Learners, provide a vocabulary box containing multiple examples of emotions that could support completion of the Expose activities. You may also include synonyms for the super overused emotions (happy, sad, mad).

Step 2: Explore

Pages 12-15 in Student Workbook

At this stage, students will spend some time brainstorming and writing down different possibilities for their own Six Word Memoir. Using lists, planning sheets and graphic organizers from their student workbook, students will reflect on events, themes, and memories (both good and bad) throughout their lives. They will consider what is most important to them and pick their top idea to use as their Six Word Memoir theme.

Differentiation Strategies

1. For Explore: Activity 3, complete one backstory as a class, before students try it on their own.

2. For Explore: Activity 3, write each memoir on a sentence strip or index card. Have students work in small groups to sort through the memoirs and select the one that they connect to most. Through discussion, students can support each other’s ideas about what makes a good connection.
3. Have students turn and talk about their ideas for a backstory. This can help further develop their ideas before they begin writing.

**Step 3: Reflect**  
*Pages 16-17 in Student Workbook*  
Children come to the table with so many unique experiences. The purpose of the Reflect activities is to give them opportunities to organize their memories and ideas in a meaningful way. Students can use the graphic organizers to reflect on their personal experiences and prioritize their memories by way of importance and impact. This step is essential in the Six-Word Memoir writing process because it is where the memoir is born.

**Differentiation Strategies**  
1. In Reflect: Activity 1, encourage students to put quality over quantity. Encourage students to have at least 1-3 ideas for each category.  
2. In Reflect: Activity 2: students may draw pictures along with their memories in the web.

**Step 4: Decide**  
*Page 18 in Student Workbook*  
Once students have reflected on their lives and thought about what is important to them, they are ready to start choosing words that can be organized into their Six Word Memoirs. The Decide activities encourage students to use main themes from their web to come up with descriptive words that can be used for their first draft.

**Differentiation Strategy**  
1. Create a descriptive words vocabulary bank to support word choice for their memoir.

**Step 5: Accomplish (Revise)**  
*Page 18-20 in Student Workbook*  
Now it’s time to put planning into action. Students will use their personal word list to write the first draft of their Six Word Memoir.

**6 Tips for Writing Six Word Memoirs**  
1. Make your six-word memoir personal and honest.  
2. Use the Six Word limitation to inspire creativity.  
3. Think about the emotion/tone you wish to express through your writing.  
4. Put the six best words in the best order to express exactly what you want to communicate.  
5. Consider where you will place capital letters and punctuation marks.  
6. Get inspired from reading other six-word memoirs.
Like any other story, students should make revisions to improve their writing. Have students reread their Six-Word Memoirs to themselves and others, taking into account word choice and the message they want to send to their readers. During this stage, have students explore the power of language by:

- Discussing how they can choose the "best words" for their Six-Word Memoirs when there may be several words in the English language that express the same, or nearly the same, idea or concept. In the Student Workbook, students will choose one “focus” word from their memoir for which they will explore possible synonyms. Make sure their word choice will work for this activity, avoiding words such as “the” or “and.” Students should list synonyms for each “focus” word, repeating the process as often as they need. Students can then substitute the “best” word into their writing. As a final step, have students reflect on their changes and explain how their revisions improved the message/tone conveyed in the Six-Word Memoir.

- Considering the placement of capital letters and punctuation marks. When you first began reading Six-Word Memoirs with your students, you may have discussed the different uses of punctuation and capitalization in Six-Word Memoirs. This is an important time to discuss what writing conventions students need to consider, making their Six-Word Memoirs clear and understandable. Students may also get creative by adding punctuation, capitalized letters or italics to make a point or send a message.

Differentiation Strategy

1. Provide students with different colored notecards. Have students write their descriptive words on one color. On the other color, have students write important pronouns and verbs (provided by the teacher). In order to support the organization of words for meaning, students can physically move around the notecards until they are satisfied with the organization of their memoir. This could be a great opportunity for peer support through group work.

Step 6: Reveal
Page 21-22 in Student Workbook

In the Student Workbook, students have the opportunity to dress up their Six-Word Memoirs to make them even more interesting and support their work through visual representations. Students will also reveal the whole story behind their memoir by writing a detailed backstory. The backstory gives writers the unique opportunity to resolve the mysteries behind their memoir and reveal the details behind their complete story.

Six Word Memoirs should not be trapped within the confines of a student notebook. They are living, breathing things and should be shared with others in order to inspire others. Here are 6 great ways to share your students’ Six-Word Memoirs with your school, community, and the world.
1. Create a published collection of Six Word Memoirs for your class. Have students create visual representations of their memoirs using computer design or drawing software. There are many free web-based programs available. Put all the pages together and come up with a catchy title for your classroom collection. You can even give a copy to your librarian to place in the school library!


3. Integrate “morning memoirs” into your classroom’s morning meeting or “end of the day memoirs” to reflect on the days’ experiences.

4. Organize a “Six Word Slam.” Pair up with other classrooms and schools in your community to organize an event in which students and teachers share their Six Word Memoirs.

5. Hold a weekly school contest in which students and staff submit Six Word Memoirs around a given topic (i.e. Back to School). The winner can be chosen by the principal and can share his/her memoir with the school during morning announcements.

6. Have students submit their six-word memoir to HamiltonBuhl at http://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/schools. If a student’s memoir is selected, it can be published on the website or even in one of SMITH's books! There will be monthly prizes awarded to the schools with the most creative Six Word Memoirs.

7. If your school is a volume user of Six Words for Schools workbooks you may qualify for a license to use our logo Six-Word Memoir logo in your school yearbook. Contact sgoldstein@vcom-mm.net for license information.

Keeping it Going: Integrating Six-Word Memoirs into Literacy, Math, Social Studies, Science and Other Content Areas

As students begin to get comfortable with the Six-Word Memoir format, they will become more and more excited to continue writing them. However, how do you balance Six-Word Memoirs with your responsibly of teaching all different subjects and covering a jam-packed curriculum? Simple: Six-Word Memoirs have the potential to be successfully integrated into literacy, math, social studies, science and any other content area.

**Six-Words in Literacy**

Reading and writing Six-Word Memoirs can be challenging for children. In essence, we are not only asking students to summarize their lives (or parts of their lives) in just six words, but also to provide sufficient clues to readers so their message can be understood. Often, the inferences are much more powerful than explicit writing. Reading Six-Word Memoirs involves
analyzing and interpreting not only what is included, but also what has been left out. Through the activities listed below, teachers can use Six Word Memoirs to improve students’ summarizing, analyzing and inferring skills to help them become better readers and writers.

2. Students summarize or respond to a reading assignment using six words.
3. Students write a six word title for their personal writing pieces.
4. Students compose a backstory for a Six-Word Memoir that captures the message the author is sending.
5. After reading a biography or autobiography, students write the life story of the subject in six words.
6. Students write past, present and future Six Word Memoirs to describe the progression of their life.

Six Words in Other Content Areas

Have students write Six Word Memoirs to

1. Describe different geometrical shapes and their attributes. (i.e. Always round. No straight edges. Circle).
2. Explain perimeter, area or any other mathematical concept.
3. Tell a story from the point of view of an animal in hibernation.
4. Write a caption for a national geographic photo.
5. Write a headline for an important news story.
6. Summarize a period in history using six words.
7. Tell the life story of a significant historical figure or event.
8. Write a Six Word Memoir to tell the story of a famous work of art.