

Multiple Ownership of the Past

“Memoir writers must manufacture a text, imposing narrative order on a jumble of half-remembered events. With that feat of manipulation, they arrive at a truth that is theirs alone, not quite like that of anybody else who was present at the same events.”

—from p. 6 of *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*,
edited by William Zinsser (Mariner Books, 1998)

“The truth is somewhere between my mother’s version and mine. But she was like that to *me*—that’s the only truth a memoir writer can work with.”

—from p. 12 of *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*,
edited by William Zinsser (Mariner Books, 1998)

1. What does the phrase “multiple ownership of the past” mean?
 - If there is “multiple ownership of the past,” then how can we know what is true?
2. What are the connotations of the phrases “manufacture a text” and “feats of manipulation”? If writers are “manufacturing” and “manipulating,” do you trust them? Why or why not?
3. How will you decide which events to include and which events and facts to omit in the memoirs *you* are writing?
 - Do you believe the memoir *you* write will be true? Why or why not?