

My Wife Wants You to Know I'm Happily Married

By Joey Franklin

Chapter-by-Chapter Resources

Below you will find discussion questions, writing prompts, & related essays that dovetail nicely with each chapter.

“The Lifespan of A Kiss”

Discussion Questions

1. This essay makes use of personal anecdotes, art history resources, a youtube video, interviews, literary and biblical references, a movie, and even a baseball manual from the 1890's. How do these various external sources work to reveal the internal emotional world of the author?
2. What parallels do you see in this essay between the personal stories and the historical material about Rodin? How does the Rodin material inform your reading of the author's personal stories?

Writing Prompts

1. Write about a personal relationship in terms of a work of art. What parallels can you draw between your life and the life of the artist? How might an analysis of the art become an analysis of your own life?
2. Write about your first kiss, but do it from a purely physiological perspective. Try to recreate your sensory response to the moment. Then write about it again, but through allusions to literature or pop-culture.

Related Essays

- “Lost Wax,” by Jericho Parns
“A Date,” by Brenda Miller

“Working at Wendy’s”

Discussion Questions

1. The essay contains almost no reflection—just one vignette after another. What is the effect of this choice? How does the essay suggest its meaning via narrative?
2. This essay introduces us to several characters other than the author—Danny the lovesick grill master, Chelsea the breast-feeding manager, David the angsty teenage rebel. Pick one of these characters and identify how that character develops over the course of the essay.

Writing Prompts

1. Write about your worst job you ever. First write about what made it so horrible. Be specific. Use scenes. Then reconsider the experience by writing about the people you worked with. What made them human? What did you learn from them? What little things about the job made it bearable? Again, do all this in scenes.
2. Take a look at the conversation the author has with his father on page 28, then think back to an awkward conversation you’ve had with a family member or friend, and try to recreate the awkwardness on the page.

Related Essays

- “Landmines,” by Eula Biss
“Meteorites,” by Brian Doyle

“Grand Theft Auto”

Discussion Questions

1. What are the ethical considerations that confront an author writing about crime and imagining the lives of other people? How does the author manage these ethical considerations?
2. How does this essay create parallels between the author and Craig, the car thief? What is the point of creating such parallels?

Writing Prompts

1. Write about a crime that has affected you or your family. Consider the crime from the perpetrator's point of view and pay attention to whether your emotional reaction to the perpetrator changes.
2. Write about an important moment in your life—a wedding, the birth of a child, a major surgery, or a car accident, but do it with a dragnet style, focusing on “just the facts.”

Related Essays

- “Letter from Fredericksburg,” by Collin Rafferty
“Jump,” by Lia Purpura

“In Their Ears and On Their Tongues”

Discussion Questions

1. What are the challenges of writing about another culture, and how does the author succeed or fail to meet those challenges?
2. Writers who address spiritual matters must find a way to talk about their own faith without alienating readers. What attempts does the author make to write inclusively about his own faith? How successful is he?

Writing Prompts

1. Analyze an aspect of your own spiritual tradition. How did you learn it? How do you practice it today? How does it compare to other spiritual traditions?
2. Swedish theologian Krister Stendahl has said that we must leave room for “holy envy” when we consider other religions. Write about something you admire in another faith tradition, and reflect on how it adds to your understanding of the world.

Related Essays

- “Leaving Babylon: A Walk through the Jewish Divorce Ceremony,” by Judyth Har-Even
“Occasional Prayer,” by Joe Bonomo

“Climbing Shingle Mill Peak”

Discussion Questions

1. How does the author simultaneously express his idealism about the nature, while acknowledging the limitations of that idealism?
2. The author uses art again in this essay to deepen his exploration of his past (this time it is Norman Rockwell’s Boy Scout paintings). What role does the art play in exploring the tensions between the author’s idealism and the reality of working with boys?

Writing Prompts

1. Write about a time in nature that either exceeded your expectations or failed to meet them.
2. Write about a time from your childhood when an adult tried (and maybe failed) to get you excited about something. Consider why that adult failed and what role you played in that failure.

Related Essays

- “Adventures in Celestial Navigation,” by Philip Gerard
- “Cloud Crossing,” by Scott Russell Sanders

“How to Be a T-Ball Parent”

Discussion Questions

1. The ‘how-to’ essay format ostensibly provides instructions to the reader, but done well, it becomes a confessional opportunity for the author. What personal confessions do you see in this essay presented as a series of directives?
2. This essay includes research on Little League in Lubbock, Texas, including interviews with key members of the Little League community. How does such research add depth to the personal story of being at T-Ball dad?

Writing Prompts

1. Write your own set of 2nd -person instructions to someone in your life. Maybe “How to survive middle school,” or “How to birth your first child,” or “How to forgive your father.”
2. Write about a time you found yourself vicariously living through your child (or a friend, or celebrity), or a time when a parent maybe tried to live vicariously through you.

Related Essays

- “Once More to the Lake,” by E.B. White
“Girl,” by Jamaica Kincaid

“The Swing is Gone”

Discussion Questions

1. This essay follows a long narrative arc of the author’s childhood as a sometimes-dancer. How does the author use reflective asides give context and add meaning to that story?
2. How does the author’s time in Japan serves as an important layer in this essay about life choices?

Writing Prompts

1. Write about a childhood passion that has gone by the wayside. Consider how that former passion still shapes you today?
2. Write about something you gave up because of a relationship? Was it worth it? What have you found to replace it?

Related Essays

- “Harpy,” by Elena Passarello
- “My Brother the Radio Host,” by Phillip Lopate

“On Haptics, Hyperrealism, and my Father’s Year in Prison”

Discussion Questions

1. Consider one of the layers in this essay—Ron Muick’s art, Jean Stevens’s corpses in her spare bedroom, the sociological research—what does that layer add to the personal exploration of the author’s relationship with his father?
2. How does the author’s empathy for his father evolve over the course of the essay?

Writing Prompts

1. Write about your biggest failure or your mother’s or father’s biggest failure. Be honest and direct, but also see if you can see that failure in a new light.
2. Consider a memory that troubles you (something like the couch memory from the beginning of this essay p. 98). What scientific research might you conduct to give you a different way of understanding that memory? Find at least three articles and write about them in the context of your chosen memory.

Related Essays

- “The Cruelty We Delivered: An Apology,” by Ira Sukrunruang
- “Under the Influence,” by Scott Russell Sanders

“Call Me Joey”

Discussion Questions

1. The author speculates in this essay about characters from the bible, a mobster, a pop singer, and a serial killer. What is the value of that speculation in your reading experience?
2. Writing about one’s own name might just be the height of navel-gazing narcissism. Does the author get away with it? How does he succeed in making you care? How does he fail?

Writing Prompts

1. Google yourself and then do some background research on at least three people who share your name. Write about the experience of comparing yourself to them.
2. Consider a favorite story from the bible, mythology, or history. Bring that story to life by writing about the unknown details, speculating your way to new insights.

Related Essays

- “Being Brians,” by Brian Doyle
- “Southside Buddhist,” by Ira Sukrungruang

“Little More than Strangers”

Discussion Questions

1. This essay is developed around a unique experience (a stranger falling asleep on the author’s shoulder during a flight). How does the author use the first two-thirds of the essay to prepare readers for that final scene?
2. Are there parts of this essay that you find funny? What helps the humor work? Does the humor fall flat anywhere?

Writing Prompts

1. Write about some of the small failures you’ve been guilty of, and consider why you hold on to them.
2. Write about a moment when your good intentions were misread by others around you.

Related Essays

- “Journey into Night,” by David Sedaris
- “Destroy your Neighbor Destroy Yourself,” by Dinty W. Moore

“My Hair Piece”

Discussion Questions

1. How does the author’s use of music as a metaphor enhance his discussion of masculinity and baldness?
2. What is the effect of the author’s use of his brother as a foil?

Writing Prompts

1. Write about a body part: Your favorite? Your least favorite? The one you can’t get out of your mind? The one that people always talk about? The one that feels the most like ‘you.’ The one that feels like a foreign body? See what you can learn about the metaphysical you by exploring the physical you.
2. Which genre of music do you associate with your teenage years? It could be music you listened to, or your Dad’s favorite album, or maybe the death metal your brother blasted from his bedroom. Write a scene from your childhood that somehow engages with that genre of music.

Related Essays

1. “The Clan of One-Breasted Women,” by Terry Tempest Williams
2. “My Life with Hair,” by Elaine Neil Orr

“Houseguest”

Discussion Questions

1. What details does the author introduce to develop narrative tension, and how do the research and reflective fragments support the development of that tension?
2. How does the author invite you to see cockroaches in a new light?

Writing Prompts

1. Write about the worst place you’ve ever lived. What was so bad about it, and how did you adjust your perspective in order to be comfortable there?
2. Think of a group of people you are uncomfortable around and write about moments you were forced to interact with them. Critique your own biases and acknowledge your reliance on stereotypes.

Related Essays

- “Killing Wolves,” by Sherry Simpson
“Prayer Dogs,” by Annie Dillard

“Language Lust”

Discussion Questions

1. How are fragments working in this essay? Look for ways that ideas in one fragment are being echoed elsewhere, where one fragment prepares for a later fragment, and where one fragment makes us reconsider a fragment that came before?
2. This essay tries to make sense of the ways that language and sexual energy emerge in our lives. Where do these two phenomena most clearly intersect in this essay?

Writing Prompts

1. Think about the people from your childhood who helped you formulate your understanding of gender. Use your memory of one of those people to write a scene that captures the way that person informed your understanding.
2. How have your views of gender, masculinity, femininity, and/or sexuality changed over time? Write about a specific moment that captures ways those changes occurred.

Related Essays

“Blank Slate,” by Silas Hanson

“If You Knew Then What I Know Now,” by Ryan Van Meter

“My Wife Wants You to Know I’m Happily Married”

Discussion Questions

1. What do you make of the structure of this essay, with its fragments divided into numbered sections? Is it just laziness on the part of the author? What is the aesthetic value of such a structural choice?
2. This fragmented essay relies on moments of aphoristic clarity in order to draw thematic connections between diverse threads of narrative, research, and rumination, and these moments are often used to tie up individual fragments. Which fragment endings are doing the most thematic, meaning-making work?

Writing Prompts

1. Consider the “fish stories,” you tell yourself about your most important relationships. Write about one of those relationships with the goal of getting at the ‘real’ story behind the “fish story.”
2. Analyze an inside joke you share with a family member. Write about the hard truths behind those inside jokes.

Related Essays

- “10 Years I’ll Never Get Back,” by Liz Stephens
- “Small Love Letters,” by Kim Dana Kupperman