



## Self-discovery Through Memoir

G26080501

with Deborah Taffa

August 30–September 6, 2026

Greetings Essayists, Dabblers in Diaries, Lovers of Lyric Language—

How fantastic that you've decided to nurture your inner artist this fall at the Ghost Ranch! I began my own journey to publication one weekend at the Iowa Summer Writing Festival, so I know the excitement you are feeling. My goal for our workshop is to feed your imagination, and encourage your playfulness with language, while also introducing you to the dynamic possibilities present in creative nonfiction.

Please keep track of this email as it contains important information for your course, "Self-Discovery in Memoir." The course involves one writing assignment/prompt based on an essay titled RAIN that you must do in advance. This assignment should be 600 words maximum! Please note that your writing assignment should be double spaced in 12-point font, titled, and printed before coming to class. Ideally, you will bring at least X copies to class (this X number will depend on how many students sign up—stay tuned for more information). Please also email your RAIN essay to me before you leave home for Ghost Ranch.



Below you will find the reading list for the class. Number two on the following list is the writing assignment I mentioned above. In other words, please note that RAIN, by Kathleen Norris contains the writing assignment that I would like you to prepare and email to me before coming to class!

1. The Fourth State of Matter, by JoAnne Beard is a personal essay.
2. Rain, by Kathleen Norris is a lyric essay.
3. Beauty: When the Other Dancer, by Alice Walker is a braided essay.
4. Place, by Dorothy Allison is a craft essay.
5. Powder, by Tobias Wolff is a narrative essay.
6. Joyas Voladora, by Brian Doyle is a lyric essay.

In addition to talking about structure, the development of persona, and the need for courage in writing, we will also talk about the writing assignment you turned in for workshop. The rest of the time we will discuss the readings assigned above, examining them for setting, plot, character development, and most especially, the role of agency in a first-person narrative. How does a cautionary tale close the story and prevent you from developing a literary persona? How do we draft characters of ourselves and others that feel real? We will spend time discussing what I like to call “the art of self-confrontation” in memoir.

Trust is an important factor in workshops. In our weekend together, I promise to honor your spirit and intent, while celebrating your growth as an artist. Writing a memoir requires both vulnerability and courage, and I admire your desire to share your stories with others.



Dawa'eh,

Deborah Jackson Taffa  
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MATERIALS LIST: Please bring a notebook and pen, or a computer to each day of class. Also, have the copy of your writing assignment, an "after" essay based on the handout titled, "Rain," by Kathleen Norris.

Reading Assignments; [BEAUTY](#), [JOYAS](#), [4TH STATE](#), [POWDER](#).

Workshop Itinerary:

August 30, 2026: 6:00-8:30pm

Students arrive at Ghost Ranch, socialize over dinner and the art opening, and then join Deborah Taffa for a conversation about the writing life as a form of healing. Personal projects, personal sources of inspiration, and personal obstacles to writing will be discussed. Please come to class ready for an icebreaker and sharing session. You will be prompted to name some of your favorite memoirs, so be ready!

August 31, 2026: 10am-noon (and) 2:00pm-4:30pm

Students will convene for a conversation about setting as a form of character development. Please come to class having already read the essay, "Place," by



Dorothy Allison for a conversation. Today's class will focus on several in class prompts and break out sessions. Plan to engage in some read aloud material followed by a discussion.

September 1, 2026: 10am-noon (and) 2:00pm-4:30pm

Students will convene for a discussion of craft elements re: memoir writing such as character development, pacing, family lore, supposition, and the art of drafting a first-person narrator (with agency). Your persona on the page will be addressed through the discussion of the following reading assignment:

"The Fourth State of Matter," by JoAnne Beard. A few writing prompts complete with small group sharing will fill out the class.

September 2, 2026: 10am-noon (and) 2:00pm-4:30pm

Students will convene with Deborah to discuss the psychological demands of memoir writing. The role of fear and pride, strategies for avoiding cautionary tales and flat characters, as well as the act of self-confrontation in locating one's non-negotiable stories will be discussed. What is the role of imagination and style in getting to deeper truths? A discussion of the following reading assignment, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer," by Alice Walker will aid us in our discussion.

September 3, 2026: 10am-noon (and) 2:00pm-4:30pm

Students will convene to discuss narrative structure via the essay "Powder," by Tobias Woolf. You will have had a night to read your classmates' writing assignments based on "Rain" by now, and half of the students will have a



workshop discussion about revision based on their shared pieces. Deborah will give practical pointers on how to take your pieces toward a future draft.

September 4, 2026: 10am-noon (and) 2:00pm-4:30pm

Students will convene to discuss the importance of syntax and carefully crafted sentences via the lyric essay "Joyas Voladoras," by Brian Doyle. You will have had another night to read your classmates' writing assignments based on "Rain" by now, and the second half of the students will have a workshop discussion about revision based on their shared pieces. Deborah will give practical pointers on how to take your pieces toward a future draft. To end our time together, Deborah will give practical pointers on how to stay inspired as you continue writing on your own at home.

September 5, 2026:

Robin Wall Kimmerer

10:00 am Workshop #1 The Serviceberry

1:30 pm: Workshop #2 Moving Beyond Gratitude: What it means and what it takes to create a world where we all truly belong to each other and the Earth

7:00 pm: Book signing and final reception

September 6, 2026

Breakfast and departure