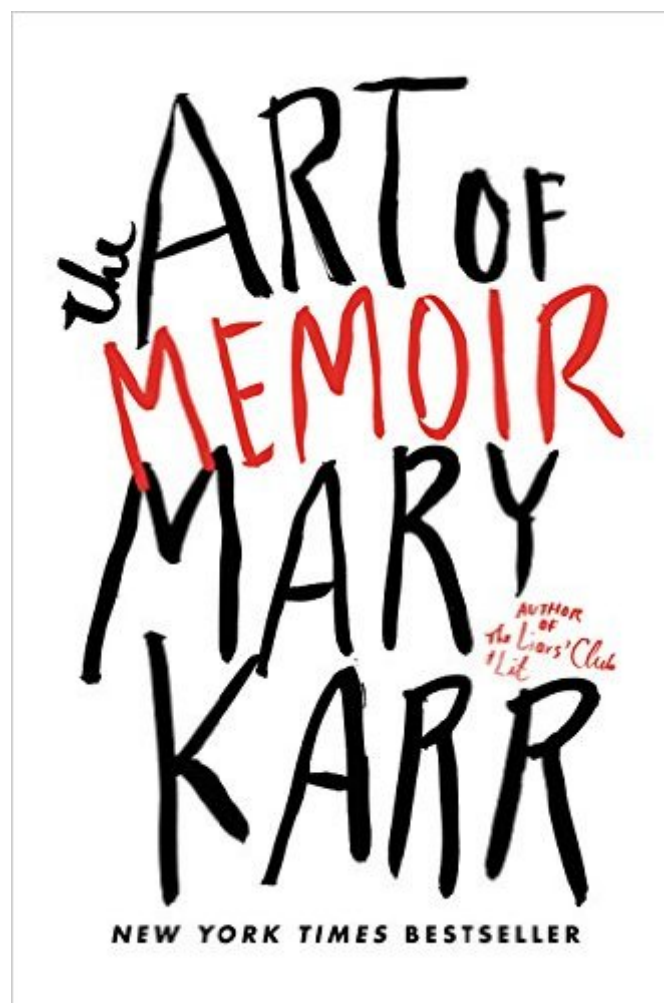


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# The Art Of Memoir



## Synopsis

Credited with sparking the current memoir explosion, Mary Karr's *The Liars Club* spent more than a year at the top of the New York Times list. She followed with two other smash bestsellers: *Cherry* and *Lit*, which were critical hits as well. For thirty years Karr has also taught the form, winning teaching prizes at Syracuse. (The writing program there produced such acclaimed authors as Cheryl Strayed, Keith Gessen, and Koren Zailckas.) In *The Art of Memoir*, she synthesizes her expertise as professor and therapy patient, writer and spiritual seeker, recovered alcoholic and a black belt sinner, providing a unique window into the mechanics and art of the form that is as irreverent, insightful, and entertaining as her own work in the genre. Anchored by excerpts from her favorite memoirs and anecdotes from fellow writers' experience, *The Art of Memoir* lays bare Karr's own process. (Plus all those inside stories about how she dealt with family and friends get told and the dark spaces in her own skull probed in depth.) As she breaks down the key elements of great literary memoir, she breaks open our concepts of memory and identity, and illuminates the cathartic power of reflecting on the past; anybody with an inner life or complicated history, whether writer or reader, will relate. Joining such classics as Stephen King's *On Writing* and Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, *The Art of Memoir* is an elegant and accessible exploration of one of today's most popular literary forms—a tour de force from an accomplished master pulling back the curtain on her craft.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is far more than a wonderful book about writing memoir. It's like an intimate conversation with an admired professional whose passion is reading and whose vocation is studying how people understand their own lives and choose to reveal them. It is a feast for anyone who loves books (and definitely not just for writers and writing students). Fans of Mary Karr's three memoirs will find fascinating information about what she left out and why. They will recognize her unique and compelling voice on every page and proceed through the book eager to read what comes next. She analyzes in helpful detail the authors and works she most admires, often adding fascinating anecdotes about them. She examines some of the high-profile failures as well. Karr shares background stories about her own writing, including the physical toll it has taken. What I most want to tell you is this. I read this book in one sitting, and when I finish this review I'm going to reread it. Then I'm going to reread Nabokov's "Speak, Memory." I will read anything Mary Karr wants to write.

I bought Mary Karr's "Liars Club" three years ago when I first began writing my memoir. I loved her writing style and was both inspired and intimidated. I just finished this book and it does such a great job breaking down key components to the craft using examples from Karr's own work as well as works by other authors from classic to contemporary. If you are writing a memoir or thinking about writing one I strongly suggest picking this up. You will learn about the importance of voice and how to find yours and stay true to it. The art of showing, not telling (which is where I need the most help). How to use/select specific details to make scenes feel more carnal and truer to the reader. And get advice on things like how to handle writing about family and topics that may be sensitive to them. You can really tell that the author is a teacher—some chapters feel like they could actually have been taken from a lesson plan—but that's what makes this book so much better than some of the others I've read about writing memoirs that were penned by agents or other industry professional types. This book isn't just a list of general tips/advice. Mary Karr is a true master of the craft and digs deeper, providing examples to give the reader a better understanding. It's almost like sitting in on one of her classes. Which after reading this book, I'd really like to do. I wish this book had come out three years ago before I started writing but now I am using what I learned to revise and edit the manuscript I have. The only negative for me was one or two of the chapters focused too much on a particular author whose style and voice didn't resonate with my taste (Nabokov for example) so I glossed over those pages. But everybody's taste in books are different. That said, in my humble opinion, this is the best book written on the craft of memoir that I have read to date.

I have been an avid reader of Mary Karr's work for almost twenty years so I was very excited when

this book was published. I have to say she has spoiled me for beautiful memoirs. She is a master of the craft and this book is a present she has wrapped up and given to her readers "and to all readers who love memoir. The Art of Memoir is also a treasure trove of invaluable information for any writer, but as a reader, I felt like I'd just crashed the private party of every memoirist's secret place. AOM made me feel privy to insider secrets and my appreciation of the genre went even deeper. She delves into her favorite memoirists' efforts and explains what she thought worked and what didn't work and why. She speaks to writers and tells them to keep their focus on their readers and to try to craft beautiful, carnal pictures/events so that readers might want to re-read their memoir (to Karr, therein lies the beauty of great memoir: re-reading). I appreciate any author who takes care to deliver to his/her readers a beautiful reading experience and clearly, Karr does. Karr even puts her own writing under the microscope and examines her life/life's work full throttle and you get a front row seat to see how her writer-mind ferrets out her own truth and how she arrives at said truth with such beauty on the page (revise, revise, revise!). She speaks about her own fear of failure when she is writing, which gives readers a glimpse into the writing process we readers think just magically appears on the page. If you are already a reader of Karr's works, know that AOM is like getting a "Behind the Scenes" at the end of your favorite movie. For me, she answered twenty plus years' worth of questions I had about her three memoirs and it was, truly, magical. If you've ever wished you could attend one of her classes at Syracuse, you now have it in your hands! If this is your first Karr read, you have some catching up to do. Lucky you! (She also writes spectacular poetry!)

The Art of Memoir by Mary Karr is a wonderfully written book which will encourage readers to tell their own stories. Karr has a very creative way with words and it's very hard to put the book down once you have started. She teaches The Art of Memoir and shares some of the classroom activities showing how a scene is viewed from different perspectives. She also shares some of her personal favorites. I found the book a breath of fresh air! A+++++++ for Mary Karr

So brilliant, so completely correct. Anyone even attempting to write about their past -- a poem, a letter, a short story -- will benefit from her teaching. In addition, it's a compilation from every outstanding memoir of the best examples of expressing truth that you will ever find in one place. Very helpful.

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