



# Selecting a Memoir Topic & Creating Scene(s)

# Lesson Overview

The purpose of this assignment is to explore the art of capturing scenes and emotions while using figurative language and specific, vivid details as well as dialogue. To see the value of specific scenes—or moments—and how narrative strategies can capture the emotion of these scenes, you will study stories through the lens of "Humans of New York" in preparation for writing personal memoir scenes.

The questions/prompts on the following slides you to think about storytelling through personal experiences, the significance of scenes and emotions, and how Stanton's project relates to broader themes of human connection and memoir writing.



How does *Humans of New York* function similarly to a memoir? In what ways do the short narratives capture the essence of personal stories, and how do they give insight into the lives of the people featured?

Record your answer here

# The *STORY* Behind “Humans of New York”

Brandon Stanton often focuses on emotions and the universal human experience. Why do you think this emotional connection is important in his work? How does it reflect key themes found in memoir writing about shared human struggles, joy, and complexity?

Record your answer here

What is the significance of sharing everyday stories through a platform like *Humans of New York*? How does this contribute to the preservation of personal histories, and how does it compare to the memoir's role in capturing individual experiences for future readers?

Record your answer here



# The *STORY* Behind “Humans of New York”

Click the image to the right; there, you will find a first person history of Humans of New York.

Record your reflection and notes here

## A PHOTOGRAPHY CENSUS

I began Humans of New York in the summer of 2010 as a photography project. My initial aim was to take ten thousand photos of random New Yorkers and plot these photos on a map of the city. I wanted to see if I could make a living as an artist. That was the whole plan. Instagram did not yet exist. At the time Facebook was only a platform to share photos with your closest friends. I put my hopes in creating a popular enough ‘blog’ that I’d be able to sell prints of my work.

# Introducing “Humans of New York”

In addition to the randomly chosen interviews that have become the hallmark of Humans of New York, over the years I have partnered with several organizations to profile certain populations or highlight important issues. These series are consistent with the rest of my work in that they feature the same portrait/interview style which centers the individual. But taken together, these collections of ‘first-person’ narratives examine a larger issue: whether that be prison reform, the Syrian refugee crisis, or the Rwandan genocide. For nearly all of these series, the storytelling occurred in parallel to a fundraising campaign, and several million dollars were raised to support research or advocacy in these area.

Click the thumbnail to the right.; here you will find several stories within a series. Answer the questions that follow.



## THE RESCUERS

In partnership with the United Nations, this series focused on the stories of people who took a moral stand during the Rwandan genocide. These are members of the Hutu majority who risked their lives to shield and protect the Tutsis.



## THE SYRIAN-AMERICANS

In partnership with the UNHCR and the Obama Administration, I travelled to Jordan and Turkey where I was able to interview twelve Syrian families that had been cleared for resettlement in America.



## PEDIATRIC CANCER

In partnership with Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital, I spent two weeks interviewing patients, caregivers, doctors, and nurses at the front lines of the battle against childhood cancer.



## INVISIBLE WOUNDS

In partnership with the Headstrong Project, this series focuses on the mental health experiences of veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.



## REFUGEE CRISIS

When the Syrian War began in 2011, millions of Syrians were forced to flee their homes and travel by boat and foot in search of a new life. In 2013 I interviewed several of these individuals and families as they made their way across Europe.



## PRISON REFORM

In partnership with the Obama Administration, I visited five different federal prisons to gather the stories of individuals sentenced to lengthy sentences for drug offenses.

# Stories: "Humans of New York"

1. **Discovering Stories:** Find a story of someone who has overcome a significant challenge. What was the challenge, and how did they overcome it? *Answer here*
2. **Cultural Exploration:** Locate a post featuring someone from a culture different from your own. What did you learn about their background or traditions? *Answer here*
3. **Career Insights:** Identify a post where the person discusses their career or passion. What inspired them to pursue this path? *Answer here*

1. **Community Impact:** Find a story where someone is making a positive impact in their community. How are they contributing, and what motivates them? *Answer here*
2. **Personal Reflections:** Choose a post where the person shares a personal reflection or lesson learned. What insights did you gain from their experience? *Answer here*
3. **Historical Perspective:** Locate a story that discusses a historical event or period. How does this person's story connect to broader historical contexts? *Answer here*



**HUMANS OF NEW YORK**

A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Exploring Scenes from  
"Humans of New York"

# Directions

- ❑ The following slides have stories (or “scenes”) to review.
- ❑ Review the stories, and answer the questions provided.
  - ❑ If there is a question that you cannot answer based on the story (for example, if there isn’t any imagery, leave it blank, but consider why that might not be part of the storytelling).
- ❑ When you finishing analyzing the scenes from the slides, complete the reflection section at the end of this slideshow.

# Post 1

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

Record your answer here

**Universal Emotion(s):** Identify the primary emotions conveyed in the post. How does the photograph & text evoke these emotions?


Record your answer here

**Images and Figurative Language:** Identify any vivid images, figurative language, and/or descriptions. How do these enhance the emotional impact or create a vivid mental picture?

Record your answer here

**Reflection/Epiphany:** Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?

Record your answer here

 Humans of New York •  
July 23 · 🌐

"It's a miracle I'm even here. My father went through World War II: the Normandy Invasion, Omaha Beach. So for him to survive all that, and live long enough to become my father—it's a miraculous thing. He died before I was eight years old. But it was enough time to experience him deeply. I was very loved, very welcomed, very cared for: my parents were thrilled I was their child. When I was younger I traveled quite a bit. Not every place, but a lot of places: Greece, Turkey, Alaska. And this wasn't just going on tours. It was real, vagabond stuff: no reservations, no plans. Just deeply experiencing another culture and another place. I've gotten to do every kind of work, from agricultural labor to factory work. For twenty years I was a social worker with seniors. But I can't even call that a job, it was a service. I got to take care of people: bring them meals, help with housekeeping. It was an absolute calling. I was a workaholic. And now that I'm retired-- I'm a playaholic. There's nonstop free music in New York. I come to this park to listen to jazz piano. I go to Juilliard to listen to student recitals. There's going to be a Dixieland ragtime ensemble near Macy's. I mean, it's endless. I'm just grateful for good health to enjoy it all. So many people wake up in pain. But I have my health, and I have a home. I mean, it's not a home. But I have a place. A safe place to rent. It's just been a blessed, beautiful life. The perfect life for me. I found it very, very rich. Very deep. And I think all of it was a blessing. All of it, miracles and blessings."



# Post 2

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

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Humans of New York  
August 27 at 9:53 AM

"He was more than my brother; he was my best friend. I wanted to be him. He was more athletic, had more friends, got more girls. And things were going great for him. He was managing a pizza place. He had two kids, my nephews. But after he lost his job he started dealing drugs. He didn't last two months in the streets. Benjamin thought the world was like our family; he was too trusting of people. And Detroit is a very dangerous place to be trusting of people. The Detroit Police Department did nothing: no leads, no investigation. It's like he wasn't even human. You can just murder people in that city. After his death I forgot about school. I dropped my classes, started drinking more, partying more. There was a lot of sex, a lot of meaningless sex. Nothing seemed to matter. It was dark. I was so angry at God, because how could he let that happen? But it's been four years now. And looking back—if he hadn't been killed, so many other things don't happen. I'd have never left Detroit. Benjamin was the one who always told me: 'You're special. You don't have to stay here.' But if he hadn't been killed, I'd have never come to New York. And if I don't come to New York, I don't meet my best friend, which is my wife. Our wedding brought my whole family together for the first time since Benjamin's death. It was love and joy again. My mom walking me down the aisle, after losing her son. It just meant the world to her. And if I hadn't met my wife, we wouldn't have a son on the way. We're naming him Benjamin."



# Post 3

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

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**Reflection/Epiphany:** Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?

Record your answer here



Click the photo for the story.

# Post 4

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

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**Reflection/Epiphany:** Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?

Record your answer here



"I was seventeen. Only child, not a lot of friends. But I had a plan. I was going to become an actress, get a role on All My Children, meet my husband on set-- and when that was all over—I'd host a talk show. Kelly Ripa did it; I could do it too. Back then it seemed like every woman on television had gotten their start as beauty queen. So my senior year I decided to enter my school's Homecoming Queen competition. It was organized like a Ms. America pageant. But this was a rough high school, only one other girl signed up-- so I had a good shot. My whole family got behind me. My mom was a seamstress. We noticed that in most pageants we watched, the winner wore a white dress. So she sewed me a white dress that I picked out of Seventeen Magazine. First came the interview portion, and that's when the trouble started. The judges asked me about the Anita Hill testimony; I wasn't ready for that. I was ready for world peace. They were supposed to ask me about my goals, so I could say world peace. But that didn't happen. The talent portion was later that night at the homecoming dance. The whole school was there. I chose a Sheena Easton song; poor choice. Not the right crowd for that. The other girl chose 'I Feel Good' by Stephanie Mills, and she had the whole crowd singing along. That's when I knew it was over. But then, a miracle. The guidance counselor quieted everyone down, and announced the winner: it was me. Me! It was my Kelly Kapowski moment. Everyone was cheering, the other girl congratulated me. But it only lasted five seconds, because the guidance counselor said: 'Wait a second, I'm sorry. Joanna is the runner-up.' It was the worst moment of my life. In fact, the only thing that got me through COVID was knowing that it could not possibly, possibly be worse than that moment. And here's a twist for you. Remember that guidance counselor? Several years later I ended up acting alongside his son in a play at Queens College. In one scene I pulled a gun on him, and the director was like: 'We need more anger. Think about something that makes you angry.' I was like: 'Well, that's easy. His father ruined my senior year. And quite possibly, my entire life.'"

# Post 5

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

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**Images and Figurative Language:** Identify any vivid images, figurative language, and/or descriptions. How do these enhance the emotional impact or create a vivid mental picture?

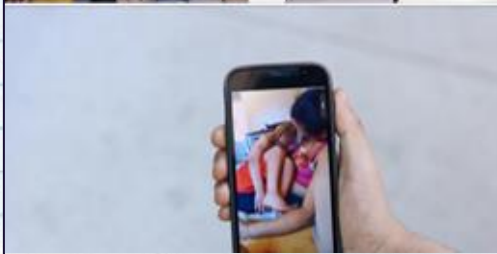
Record your answer here

**Reflection/Epiphany:** Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?

Record your answer here

Humans of New York •  
April 1 •

"It's a love/hate relationship. Hate is too strong a word. But she just can't accept that I'm not a kid anymore. I'm a lot more mature than most fourteen-year-olds; I already have a job and everything. But she'll shut me down just to get at me. And there's nothing I can do because she's my Mom. She's always on top of me: be careful with this, be careful with that. Won't let me go to my friend's houses if they're a little further than our neighborhood. And we're both stubborn, so if I try to argue it goes back and forth. She doesn't want to see her kid be right. She gives me no choice but to be loud and extreme just to get my point across. But look, I get it. She's got this Google folder on her phone with like 1400 photos of me when I was younger. It goes all the way back to my first day of school. The other day I went into the kitchen to get a drink, and I caught her scrolling through the pictures, and she's crying. I was like damn. So look-- I get it. I'm still mad, but I get it."



# Post 6

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

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Record your answer here



Humans of New York

June 18 · 🌐

"People see it as a fake sport. Whenever you tell someone you play Ultimate, it's like: oh, is that where you throw a frisbee in a basket? Or is that the one where you throw it to a dog? Whenever I'm talking to someone about it, I just hope they'll ask me enough questions so that I can talk about UNC Ultimate. That was probably the most special experience I'm ever going to have in my whole life. I was on the team for five years, then I came back and coached. My freshman year we were really, really bad. But at the moment UNC Chapel Hill is triple back-to-back-to-back national champions. And I got to be part of that trajectory. But even though the team kept getting better and better, I kinda stayed at the same level. I never became the elite player that I wanted to be. I have a lot of 'stick-to-it-ive-ness.' I'm capable of working really, really hard. And part of me always believed that would be enough, which is the part that burned me out. Because after working so hard, for so long, I reached a plateau. It was physical stuff. I'm just not quick enough. When I play defense I can't keep up with the fastest offensive handlers. They're going to score, and that's a problem. I ended up getting cut from the elite women's club team I was on. I switched over to mixed, but ended up tearing my ACL a couple years ago. It's been my life for ten years, but now I'm at a place where I don't know if I'm ever going to play again. I just don't know if my body can handle it. I don't want to have another, like massive orthopedic surgery. And frisbee takes up so much bandwidth; there's so many other things I want to explore. The list is infinitely long. I'm asking myself: could I be happy playing on a mid-level team where the commitment wouldn't be quite as high? Or will I only feel satisfied if I'm exceptional? That's an unhealthy connection I have in my head, I think. That love is something you need to earn. And being exceptional will make me worthy of having connections with people. It would be great to become a version of myself where I no longer feel that way. And maybe we'll get there someday. We're working on it. In the meantime, at least I got to talk about UNC Ultimate."

# Post 7

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Record your answer here



Humans of New York •  
September 30, 2023 · 🌐

"I grew up with strangers. I wasn't even with my parents from first to fifth grade. All the people that were supposed to care for me, and teach me, and guide me, they all failed me. It caused a lot of anger and honestly, a lot of heartbreak. I even wondered if my family was cursed. Like all we do is come into this world and we struggle. From the age of twelve I had to go straight home from school and take care of my baby sister. I was the one making sure she was OK: feeding her, changing her, bathing her. It's like my life was in shackles. I didn't even start playing basketball for real until I was sixteen. That was the summer I was like: 'I'm done. I'm not y'all's babysitter.' I started waking up early and going to the park for hours, doing drills. Basketball gave me a sense of control. The more I worked, the better I got, and it was like: 'Wow. I can really do this.' It's like I was finally the one writing my story. I ended up trying out for the school team my senior year: no skills, no talent, just starting to understand the game. But the things I could do, I did better than everyone else: diving for loose balls, grabbing rebounds, and hustling. It was mainly hustle. And I think the coach saw that, or maybe he just felt sorry for me. Because he created an extra spot on the roster just for me. There weren't even enough uniforms, I had a different uniform than everybody else, and during the away games the crowd would let me know. They let me hear it, but I didn't care. I was just so happy to be there. I couldn't shoot, but I'd go one hundred percent on defense. The coach would put me on the other team's best player. I'd stay right up under his jersey. I'd chase him all over the court. And by the end of the year I was in the rotation. We won the city championship that year. During the final game our starters got off to a slow start, and the coach wanted some energy. So he looked down to the end of the bench and said: 'Rey, go in.' Right away I got a steal. The crowd was going wild. Proudest moment of my life. I took it all the way back down the court, and unfortunately, I missed the lay-up. Would have been a perfect ending, but man. I was just way too excited."

# Post 8

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

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Record your answer here

Humans of New York

January 10

"My first end-of-life patient was a 97-year-old man. He had a much younger girlfriend; she was seventy-four. But they loved each other so much. Back when their spouses were still alive, the four of them had been great friends. They would double date together. And when their spouses passed away—the two of them became a thing. Every day she would come over for lunch. I'd always cook a little meal for them. I'd prepare the table; I'd lay out my little candles and my little flowers. As soon as she arrived I'd put on music and dim the lights, then I'd leave the room and go wait in the bedroom. They would cuddle and snuggle. And the beauty of it was—even though he couldn't control his fluids at that point, she never minded the smell. Her love for him was so great that they would still kiss and all that good stuff. When the doctors said that it was time for him to go to hospice, he said he didn't want to go. He told them that he wanted to come back home and die with me. I was with him in the end. My patients never die alone. Never, ever. One week after his passing I was hired by his girlfriend's family. She had terminal Alzheimer's, and I ended up staying with her for seven years. I fell in love with her. We were family, just family. She used to be a tap dancer. We'd sing together. And if she didn't feel like singing, I'd sing. Even near the end, she always knew when something was wrong with me. When I wasn't being the Gabby that she knew-- she would always know. When the doctors said it was time for her to go to hospice, her children said: 'We want her to die with Gabby.' In the final days she wouldn't eat, she'd lock her jaw. But she would always eat for me. One night I could see the fright in her eyes, and I knew it was time. My patients never die alone. Never, ever. So I climbed under the covers with her. And she passed away in my arms."



# Post 9

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

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Humans of New York

January 5

"Just the other day a video popped up on Facebook. It was only five years ago. We were in the park. I was pushing her on the bike, letting go. We used to have so much fun together. We'd always get ice cream. She's a strawberry girl. I'm a vanilla guy. Chipwich, actually. I'm a Chipwich guy. She'd give me a hug afterward, tell me I was the best dad ever. We were such good friends. But now it feels like we're so far apart. She doesn't want to talk to me anymore. Even when she's upset, she'll ignore me and go to her room. It's like: C'mon. I was fifteen too. I know what it's like. But she'll come back, I know that. They always come back. But it does feel like you're getting your heart ripped out a little bit. But look, I get it. She's figuring out life. You have to back off. You have to give them space. Cause if you charge after them and get all aggressive about it, you might push them away forever. But they always come back, right? One day she's gonna realize that I'm not the enemy and I'm really her dad, her friend. I still get a flicker of it, every once in awhile. We had a really surreal moment last year. Her birthday is March 17th. She's a St. Paddy's Day birthday. We always take her to a Spanish restaurant on Long Island, but this time we did something special. Her uncle used to be a bodyguard for Taylor Swift, and we still know some people at the company. So they got us tickets to her concert. Fifth row seats. I mean, don't get me wrong. We paid for them-- but fifth row center. She was crying. I got a big hug. A big kiss. A 'Thank you, Dad.' It wasn't 'You're the best dad ever.' But it was a really big: 'Thank you, Dad.'"

# Post 10

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

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 Humans of New York  
November 1, 2023 · 🌐

"They told me they loved me constantly, chronically, every day. They gave me a good home. They cared for me. They did all the basics, and above all that: they worked hard to put me in a great school district. But no matter how much they provide, your parents can't give a shit for you. I made every bad choice a high schooler could make: tv, video games, pornography. All the stuff that you use to not think about stuff. It's immediately gratifying, maybe the first 50 or 100 times. But after the 200th time, that stuff becomes who you are. I guess the whole time I was just hoping that someone would come along and tell me exactly what to do with my life, or else it would just come to me. Maybe that happens for some people. But for the other ninety percent of us, we have to make the conscious decision to just go. At first I told my dad I was joining The Marines. He's an attorney. It certainly wasn't what he would have chosen for me. But he said: 'If this is what you want to do, you're going to visit every branch. You're going to make an educated decision.' On the day I signed with the Coast Guard, I remember telling him: 'I just want to be a good man.' That's as far as I'd gotten. That's the only thing that I knew for sure. I didn't know where the path was going to lead, but I was just tired of not trying. I figured it was better to just start walking and see what the hell happens. Because I know what happens if I don't do anything."



# Post 11

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"It's been a tough morning for me. I used to be a children's librarian. But this morning I had to call publishers and tell them not to send me any more books. I just can't read them anymore, not like I used to. And that was hard. It felt like I was cutting off a lifeline. It's disappointing, the sense of not being in control of my own life anymore. Everything depends on my medical schedule, and the chemotherapy, and what my limits are. The doctor has told me to expect a couple more years, but my caretaker says she's seen a lot of sick people. And she thinks I could be one of the ones who can beat it. For most of my life happiness was automatic. I might have had the only career where you get told 'I love you' three or four times a week. Maybe it happens with teachers too, but so many little kids said those words to me over the years. And I miss that. I was damned lucky to have that experience. Happiness isn't automatic anymore, these days I have to work a little bit more for it. In addition to all the pain and the fear and having to pee all the time, I choose to do a lot of things that will make me aware of the beauty and loveliness of life. It's not magic. I don't stop thinking about the scary stuff, I just find moments to push them aside with the ridiculous. There's so much in life that's ridiculous. Every Saturday morning I watch Popeye on Turner Classic Movies. It's so ridiculous. Olive Oil is so obnoxious. And you know, she has all these men after her. It's just really funny. And Popeye is so full of himself and somehow manages to come out of everything, eat his spinach, and win. Then there's my laughing yoga classes, which I can't do in person anymore. But I do them online. There's this thing we do where people will get in lines of three or four, and we'll pretend to have a boat race. Everyone rows as hard as they can. Someone chooses a winner, and if you lose you get to create a big scene and make an ass of yourself. It's ridiculous. And then there's you. You're ridiculous. You're stopping random people, presumably to entertain yourself. You're sitting in the middle of the street. I mean, think about it. It's pretty dumb."



# Post 12

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

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Humans of New York

October 2, 2023

"The person who hurt us, hurt both of us. But it affected us differently. I isolated myself. I started taking drugs when I was twelve, maybe thirteen. But she just moved on with her life. I could never understand: how can she be so happy, while I'm stuck in my head and constantly thinking about it? It was exhausting to me. She was exhausting to me, especially when we were teenagers. I couldn't stand to be around her because she was so light and positive and funny. Everything was always so cool, and so good. It felt to me that she didn't want to face it. She just wanted to accept that it happened, and move on. But I couldn't move on. I didn't have that choice. I couldn't just choose to not think about it. I remember the bad things, and how they made me feel. And I never want to feel that way again. I couldn't just go back out into the world like it never even happened. I know that there are a lot more good people than bad, I do believe that. But there are bad people too. And they can really hurt you deeply if you give them your trust. So I never trusted anyone. Three years ago it reached a point where I felt completely hopeless. It was all so exhausting. I was exhausted. Exhausted from carrying these heavy feelings. Exhausted from making bad decisions. Exhausted from the drugs. It felt like nothing was ever going to change for me. Around that time we went out to dinner with my mother, and we finally had a deep talk about everything. We'd talked about it before, but maybe this time I really meant it. I decided that I have to let it go. I just have to let it go. I still have dark times when I don't want to study or work. But when I'm in a bad mood, I'll turn to her. Her happiness doesn't make me feel worse anymore. It motivates me. It inspires me. Now she's the person who can most easily put me in a good mood. I let her be a part of my bad days. And because of that, she's also become a huge part of my good days. Both of us have gotten a lot more mature, and a lot wiser. But it was mainly me, I think. I had to change. If I hadn't found a way to let go, we'd still be too different to be this close."

# Post 13

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** *Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.*

Record your answer here

**Universal Emotion(s):** *Identify the primary emotions conveyed in the post. How does the photograph & text evoke these emotions?*

Record your answer here

**Images and Figurative Language:** *Identify any vivid images, figurative language, and/or descriptions. How do these enhance the emotional impact or create a vivid mental picture?*

Record your answer here

**Reflection/Epiphany:** *Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?*

Record your answer here



Humans of New York

January 4 · 🌐

"I'm taking a break from school until I figure things out. I guess I have rebel traits. There were just so many things that felt out of my control, and it bothered me. You have to wake up at this time. You have to go do this. You have to go do that. It's like I didn't have any originality. There was a certain point when I realized that everything-- this whole routine that I had, had been given to me by other people. And the weird thing is--whenever you try to remove yourself from that equation, and stop doing what other people want, you kind of get ostracized and outcast. That's kinda what happened to me. I have a great family, but it's full of strong personalities. I had so many people telling me: do this, do that. They said it was a 'respect' thing. You know: 'I'm the adult, so you should respect me.' But I never understood that. Because at what age do I get this thing called respect? Nobody in my family could ever answer that question. Is it when I have a kid? Is that it? Or is it when I'm paying a certain amount of bills? At what point do I step up on the pedestal?"



# Post 14

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

Record your answer here

**Universal Emotion(s):** Identify the primary emotions conveyed in the post. How does the photograph & text evoke these emotions?

Record your answer here

**Images and Figurative Language:** Identify any vivid images, figurative language, and/or descriptions. How do these enhance the emotional impact or create a vivid mental picture?

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**Reflection/Epiphany:** Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?

Record your answer here



"Growing up I was very much in my own head, my own world. Instead of getting a babysitter my mom would just go to work and leave me at the house. We didn't have a TV or anything. And when there's no one to talk to, you just become your own friend. I'd look out the window and try to imagine myself doing things. Like: 'What would it be like if I was standing on that roof? What sort of things would I see?' But when you do that too much, at some point you get lost. I didn't even feel alone. It's hard to explain, because I haven't experienced nothing else. But it's like: you don't feel lonely if there's never nobody else there. And there was never nobody else there. Alone was my normal. It was my comfortable. So when we first started dating, I didn't know what to do. Every time we were alone I would speak non-stop. Then I'd stop myself mid-sentence and be like, 'Damn. I'm speaking a lot. I need to shut up.' And she'd be like: 'No, just keep telling me what you were telling me.' I was just so excited. I felt like I a kid with a new toy. I'm not calling her a toy, that's not what I mean. But that's how I felt. Like I don't know how this works, but I can't believe I have it. I'm in love now. For so long I'd told myself: 'This is never going to happen.' But then it actually happened. It was like: 'What do I do? Where do I go now?' Every day has been something new. Monday feels like Saturday, because every day has meaning. I'm figuring out about her, and about myself, and about the world. Like—I didn't know you could have fun in winter. There's so many indoor activities you can do, just simple things. Like wearing matching pajamas on New Years. I never knew about that stuff. It can be so fulfilling. Sometimes you don't even have to do anything. Just having somebody sitting next to you makes you feel nice inside. And that's how it is now. That's how my life is. She's my comfortable. When she's not with me, I wish that she was. I feel what it feels to be alone."

# Post 15

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

Record your answer here

**Universal Emotion(s):** Identify the primary emotions conveyed in the post. How does the photograph & text evoke these emotions?

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**Reflection/Epiphany:** Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?

Record your answer here



"Whenever there was an event at school, he'd come straight from work. Wearing these heavy blue coveralls. Stomping around in these big, chunky boots. He'd have a tag with his name on it: Herbie—written big like. He was always so noticeable. That's the main thing I remember: the other parents seemed smaller. Maybe not smaller, but sleeker: tight button-tops, khakis. I was one of two Hispanic kids in my grade. I'd only gotten in through a program that sends black and brown kids to private school. But I never felt discriminated against. We all loved the same video games and YouTube videos. Within a few weeks I was going to friends' houses for sleepovers. These houses were humongous. Everyone had their own rooms. Then I'd go back to our house, in the Hispanic neighborhood. And it was just a square with a triangle roof. And we had like ten people living there. It was different. Behind closed doors, I knew we were different. And that juxtaposition was a little too much to overcome in my head. I felt like if I wanted to fully step into this new role, I needed to shed all that. I'm on the other side of it now. I graduated from a private university. I'm working at a tech start-up. I feel like this was it. When my parents came over, this was their intention. I've fully assimilated. But now that I'm here, I kinda miss what I've left behind. I've lost it. It's not that I chose another culture. My life just got filled with other stuff, and I let it go by the wayside. I don't even really speak Spanish anymore. Maybe in very small bursts, or whatever. But I miss the curse words, the slang. I miss it being commonplace. Mainly I just miss being around people like me: feature wise, and stuff like that. At least now that I'm in New York, I can take the train home every other weekend. It's like a celebration, every time I come back. We don't all live together anymore; but the whole family's nearby. Everyone comes over. My dad grills out: steak, tortillas, vegetables. Eating home cooked food, it's like I'm a kid again. It's healing in a way. It feels right. Knowing I'm in a good spot. I've gotten to where I want to be, but I'm back with the people that I've always been with."

# Post 16

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

Record your answer here

**Universal Emotion(s):** Identify the primary emotions conveyed in the post. How does the photograph & text evoke these emotions?

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**Reflection/Epiphany:** Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?

Record your answer here

"I think when I'm old I'm going to have gray hair. It's already turning gray, so I'll definitely have gray hair. Maybe I'll have bulked up at that point. My dad has skinny legs and arms—but he's buff in the middle. So hopefully I'll be that. I'll probably just be sitting around. But not in a rocking chair or anything— just on the ground. Maybe in a boat. I think it would be cool to have a boat. I used to always make fun of straight dudes who talked about fishing. But now I'm thinking: maybe I should fish. Really learn to survive off the land. Like gut the fish myself and gross out the kids. Not my kids necessarily, but maybe my siblings' kids, I'll be the best worst uncle ever. I'm also hoping that I'll have drawn a lot of stuff by then. Maybe even published a few books. And hopefully there will be a nice handful of people who really like my stuff. They'll think it was a nice contribution to the world. And they'll care when I die. But mainly I'm just glad I get to be an old man. I could never imagine myself as an old woman. Like, I couldn't. So the future was just-- nothing. But now I'm here. So I feel like I can't be too upset about anything, you know? Because when I looked at the future, there was nothing. And now there's something. And that's everything."



# Post 17

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

Record your answer here

**Universal Emotion(s):** Identify the primary emotions conveyed in the post. How does the photograph & text evoke these emotions?

Record your answer here

**Images and Figurative Language:** Identify any vivid images, figurative language, and/or descriptions. How do these enhance the emotional impact or create a vivid mental picture?

Record your answer here

**Reflection/Epiphany:** Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?

Record your answer here



Humans of New York •

January 17, 2023 •

"I worked as a legal assistant for 50 years. And I've always been lucky to work for honest, kind, brilliant attorneys. All that paperwork might seem boring to other people. But I never even took lunch, that's how much I loved it. I loved the law. It's very precise. My work needed to be exactly right. And there was a lot of pride there. But something seems to have changed in the culture. So many of my coworkers would rush out the door at 5 o'clock. With important, unfinished things on their desk. In law you have to get things out quickly, but it's like they just didn't care. Maybe it's a generational thing. I'm older, I'm 77. So maybe there's something I don't get. 'Quiet quitting,' and all of that, I just don't understand it. If it's just a paycheck to you—if you're getting by on the minimum, and not trying to be perfect, or God forbid, if you're screwing it up on purpose-- why are you even going to work? Save your pennies and quit. Find something else you can take pride in. If you're spending eight hours a day on something you don't take pride in, it seems to me that somewhere, deep down inside, you're a phony. Maybe not a phony. But you're deluding yourself. It's going to spill over into the rest of your life. And there's not enough money for me. Well, \$20,000 a week maybe. But otherwise there's not enough money for me to not take pride in my work. I couldn't do it. I know that sounds ridiculous, but I can't. You know how people text, and there's like spelling mistakes and grammar mistakes and everything? Not me. I'll reread everything. I'll go back and fix it, I'll put in the comma. That's who I am. You either have it or you don't, and less people have it now. I think it was the digital revolution. When I first started working there were typewriters. If you made a mistake, you had to redo it. You had to be careful, you had to get it right - until the computer came along. I remember my boss was so excited about the computer age. He said: 'It's going to be great! We're going to have a paperless office!' I knew better. I told him: 'There's going to be a lot more paper, actually.' Because you can reprint everything. And nobody's going to care anymore."



# Post 18

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** *Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.*

Record your answer here

**Universal Emotion(s):** *Identify the primary emotions conveyed in the post. How does the photograph & text evoke these emotions?*

Record your answer here

**Images and Figurative Language:** *Identify any vivid images, figurative language, and/or descriptions. How do these enhance the emotional impact or create a vivid mental picture?*

Record your answer here

**Reflection/Epiphany:** *Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?*

Record your answer here

"Summertime and Christmas. That's when I have her. Been that way for seven years. When she's not in school, she's with me. Then at the end of the summer I bring her back to her Mom's house in Florida. Those drop-offs are the worst; I almost miss my flight every time. I wait until the last possible second to call my uber for the airport. I hug her, say goodbye, put my stuff in the car. Then I always gotta come back again and get my last kiss. Always, always. That uber ride sucks. That plane ride sucks. Cause I know I'm not going to see her for a few months. On the wall in my closet we keep track of her height. And every time she comes back, she's grown like two inches. That's a lot. That's a lot I don't see. But she knows she can call me for whatever, which she does. And whenever she's here she gets to be the CEO of our lives. She's not a dictator or anything. But she's the president. I'm the people. When she says we go, we go. She wants to go to the pool, we go to the pool. She wants to go to the beach, we go to the beach. We came here today for the Juneteenth celebration. Been planning it for two weeks. I'm supposed to be at work today, but I took off early. There's a bouncy house and face painting and all kinds of good stuff. But she didn't want to do any of it. We stayed for two minutes. And now we're back to feeding the animals; same thing we do every day."



# Post 19

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** *Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.*

Record your answer here

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Record your answer here

**Reflection/Epiphany:** *Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?*

Record your answer here



Humans of New York

January 10, 2023 · 🌐

"My parents used to tell us: with what little you have, be a blessing to others. But my father also said this: don't let people smell your money. I didn't know what he meant. But what he meant is: when you have things, don't announce it. Because once you announce it, people smell it. The aroma gets in them, and they start to make it theirs. They'll start to think: I need it more than him, he can give some to me. And they'll come up with a thousand reasons to get it from you. Don't get me wrong, they're real reasons. But six months later: here comes another one. You'd think that the more you do, the less you'll need to do. But it doesn't seem to work that way. With a lot of people, the more you do, the more they seem to need. It's not good psychologically. And it's not good economically. For my whole life I've been the person people come to. But I'm almost sixty now. I'm not where I want to be, so I'm slowing down on the giving. I still want to be a part of the whole thing: pay it forward, be blessed to be a blessing. God is love, but God is also discernment. And I can't let other people's emergencies cause me to have an emergency."



# Post 20

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

Record your answer here

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**Images and Figurative Language:** Identify any vivid images, figurative language, and/or descriptions. How do these enhance the emotional impact or create a vivid mental picture?

Record your answer here

**Reflection/Epiphany:** Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?

Record your answer here



Humans of New York

December 28, 2022

"It felt like freedom, maybe; but I was spiraling. There was a hurricane in my head: certain addictions, and impulsive decisions that could affect me for the rest of my life. Other people would see it, and they'd say: 'He's so fun.' But nobody was looking at me, really. They'd never have noticed if I was hurting myself, or if I slipped away. I got good at floating around and giving people what they want-- just enough positivity-- so I could get through the moment and leave a good impression. But I can't do that with her. When I think a certain thing, she reacts. She wants to know more. And when I feel a certain way, she feels it too. Nobody's cared like she cared, you know? I feel seen. I feel found. Like there's something outside of me. Like somebody touched my face. Sometimes when I'm sleeping, she'll do this thing. She'll reach over and touch my face. She'll just hold onto it. And that's the image that keeps coming into my head, when I try to describe her. She touched my face."



# Post 21

"I call it God's Gift; it's priceless. 1981 Oldsmobile Cutlass, right? I got a great deal on it. And I knew it matched my vibe. In the beginning it was all about the exterior. Visual stuff, you know what I mean: add-ons, and new rims, and new tires with fresh white walls. But I ended up losing my first engine. Because I never paid much attention to things like maintenance, and oil changes. How clean it should be on the inside. When they lifted the old engine out of the car, I remember thinking: it looks just like a mechanical heart. It made me think about the food I was eating. There were never many healthy choices in my community. It was McDonald's every day after school. Either that or corner store food: powdered donuts, sunflower seeds, bag of chips. I grew up on that, heavily. Those are low vibrational foods. And I think they were responsible for a lot of my most negative behaviors. Right now I'm in transition to a plant-based diet. And I definitely try to stay away from anything man-made. People in my community see me in the street, just by my panache, my verve. They notice it. And they want to know: what can they do to obtain it? I tell them the truth: the diet. Then I invite them to stop by my place for a juice. I make it every morning in the kitchen. All my ingredients come from a local market in Yonkers. I choose rare, exotic fruits: things that can be out of reach: passion fruit, dragon fruit, sour sop, purple carrots, golden beets. My specialty is sea moss. Sea moss has 92 out of the 100 minerals that your body needs. And I mix it right. A lot of this stuff is new to the people in my community. But I can tell you right now—never had anyone yet, make a funny face about one of my drinks."



**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** *Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.*

*Record your answer here*

**Universal Emotion(s):** *Identify the primary emotions conveyed in the post. How does the photograph & text evoke these emotions?*

*Record your answer here*

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*Record your answer here*

**Reflection/Epiphany:** *Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?*

*Record your answer here*

# Post 22



"We got shut down two days before St. Patrick's Day. Always the biggest day for an Irish bar. My husband is a longshoreman, so he was trapped in the Aleutian Islands for nine months—no flights out. It was just me and six kids that needed homeschooling. I pulled all the furniture out of the bar, and made a section for each of them: pillow, blankets, everything they needed. Then I had to figure out how to survive. Other bar owners were just throwing up their hands, but I had to try something. I began catering dinners for emergency workers at a nearby hotel. It wasn't much money, but it was something to do. Each night I'd cook dinner for thirty people. The kids would help when they could: peeling potatoes, washing dishes. But I'd be so exhausted every day. Everyone had so much faith in me to survive. Maybe because I keep the tough side out—everyone assumed I was OK. Nobody knew I was full of worries. But it was so freakin' hard. To keep the kids happy. Month after month I'm falling further behind on the rent. It felt like the walls were closing in. But my regulars kept showing up. They ran errands for me. Sometimes they'd take the kids on walks to give me a break. There was a group of Irish musicians who would play here every Thursday night. They helped me set up an online store, so that I could sell scones to the music people. Soda bread scones with homemade blackberry jam. My mother's recipe from back in Ireland. Really, it's the simplest thing-- but all six of us kids used to line up for them. In January a reporter named Roger Clark from NY1 came to do a story on the bar—about how I've been running it all alone, with my kids. And that angel, he had the anchors taste a scone live on TV. It created big scone hype for a few months. It wasn't a ton of money. I was only making \$1800 for 100 boxes of scones. It wasn't paying rent or anything. But it was something to do, you know? I finally found something that was working. People were writing notes, saying: 'I gave these to my grandmother, and she loved them.' It was the little bit of light that I needed. It pulled me forward. I didn't feel alone anymore. It was like: 'Oh My God, there's something out there!'"

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** *Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.*

*Record your answer here*

**Universal Emotion(s):** *Identify the primary emotions conveyed in the post. How does the photograph & text evoke these emotions?*

*Record your answer here*

**Images and Figurative Language:** *Identify any vivid images, figurative language, and/or descriptions. How do these enhance the emotional impact or create a vivid mental picture?*

*Record your answer here*

**Reflection/Epiphany:** *Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?*

*Record your answer here*

# Post 23

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

Record your answer here

**Universal Emotion(s):** Identify the primary emotions conveyed in the post. How does the photograph & text evoke these emotions?

Record your answer here

**Images and Figurative Language:** Identify any vivid images, figurative language, and/or descriptions. How do these enhance the emotional impact or create a vivid mental picture?

Record your answer here

**Reflection/Epiphany:** Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?

Record your answer here

"The school wanted to create some new after-school programs. I'd run track in high school. Was I good? No. But I ran. So I volunteered to create the track program. The minimum to form a team is eight girls. Luckily I'm a cool teacher, I'm not rushing them to be grown. And I know the memes. So I had some girls who signed up just to be around me. In the end I found my eight. Nobody had any track experience. But these girls had playground reputations; they were fast. We just needed to build up our endurance. At our first practice we ran around the track one time, just to see how we were feeling. I ran out front to show them how it's done. At one point I turn around-- I got girls walking, I got girls stopping. My goal was just to finish the season. I wanted them to learn commitment. So when they grow up they can determine their own way without somebody pushing them. We were a little nervous on the morning of our first meet. Some of us were panicky. Some of us were crying. I told them: We don't need any MVPs. We don't need any Rookies of The Year. Just don't stop running. No matter what—just don't stop running.' All of them raced in different heats. Then the scores started coming in; it was like: 'Whoa. What's up. We winning this?' A lot of the girls placed. Our captain Jaziah was second out of 24 girls. That was the day we became a team. I started buying Gatorade. We chose a team name. Every time I gave a suggestion, they'd be like: 'That's corny. That's corny.' They're in that phase of like, they hate everything. But when we got to 'Baby Got Track,' that hit. BGT, baby. BGT. Now before every meet we do our BGT chant to give us a little bit of that braggadocious energy. These girls are committed. During the 7th grade trip to the Poconos, the BGT girls were in my cabin. We woke up an hour early, ate breakfast, brushed our teeth—then we ran track. Tomorrow is the championship. We know that we can do it and we're gonna show that we can do it. But no matter what happens, these girls are already leaders in the middle school. Our principal has noticed the results. We're getting brand new jerseys. And next year we're going to have an indoor track team too."



# Post 24

**Key Scene Characteristics & Epiphany/Reflection:** Describe the setting, character(s), conflict/tension, notable details that contribute to mood.

Record your answer here

**Universal Emotion(s):** Identify the primary emotions conveyed in the post. How does the photograph & text evoke these emotions?

Record your answer here

**Images and Figurative Language:** Identify any vivid images, figurative language, and/or descriptions. How do these enhance the emotional impact or create a vivid mental picture?


Record your answer here

**Reflection/Epiphany:** Identify the shift or realization the speaker conveys in this post. What is their lesson, a-ha, or shift in perspective?

Record your answer here

"I've never been a sports person. But I just spent three years locked in my apartment. I've cycled through all the arts and crafts already: painting, ceramics, you name it. So I wanted to try a sport. And let me tell you-- it's a whole new level of pressure. Because there are other people involved. They told me that pickleball was a sport anyone could play. I took them at their word, and it's been torture ever since. I started with a class at the YMCA; they advertised for people with 'mixed abilities.' But when they say 'mixed,' that means mixed with advanced people. During my first game I flew. I mean I actually flew. Balance is a big issue at my age. If you don't balance, you fly. And I flew. The teacher said: 'If it's out of your range, just let it go. Let it go.' Everyone was sympathetic. I think they were impressed I didn't go straight home. But after the first game, you know, people have expectations. I couldn't serve, I couldn't return. Nobody said anything. But when there's a bunch of stuff you're supposed to do that you can't do, and every time you play, your side is zero-- people start to notice. They try to act like they don't care. But this is New York; there's limited time on the courts. They care. So after my third game I was like: 'see you later.' I signed up for clinics at the rec center. Then I found a nice spot in Jersey where nobody was playing. Lots of wall. Lots of space. Perfect for me. I even got in a few serves. And that was fighting the wind, because it was right on the water. Of course as soon as I got back to the clinic, I couldn't do it. But I'm going to keep trying. All I care about is having good form and enjoying the game. Winning isn't important. I'm not a competitive person. But I'm the kind of 'not competitive' that's not competitive because I know I'm going to lose, so you know what? Yeah, I'd like to win one. It would be nice to win a game. I just have to get through all this other stuff to get there."





Reflecting & Connecting  
to Classroom Content

# The Human Experience

How do the photographs and short anecdotes in *Humans of New York* act as snapshots or “scenes” in a person's life? **Pick one example and explain how the story of the person unfolds like a scene from a memoir or a moment of storytelling.** Choose from the website [here](#).

Record your answer here

Memoir writing often evokes deep emotions by delving into personal experiences. How do the stories in *Humans of New York* use emotions to make us reflect on our own lives and the lives of others? **How does the scene you have chosen convey a “bigger” human experience?**

Record your answer here

insert chosen scene here

# Identity, Reflection, & Storytelling Technique

Many of the stories in *Humans of New York* reflect on identity, purpose, and self-reflection. How does this type of introspection align with memoir writing, and why is it valuable in exploring the human condition?

Record your answer here

Consider the brevity (shortness) of each *Humans of New York* post. How does Stanton's use of short, concise storytelling mirror techniques used in memoir writing, where a few key moments or reflections capture the essence of a much larger experience?

Record your answer here

Think about your own ideas and what scene you could possibly create for your own personal writing/memoir. What do you hope to capture about the "larger human experience?"

Record your answer here

# Reflection

Write a reflection discussing how "Humans of New York" captures the essence of everyday life and universal human experiences.

Consider:

- What makes these posts effective in conveying emotions and scenes?
- How does the combination of image and text work together to create a powerful narrative?
- What techniques from "Humans of New York" can you apply to your own writing to enhance your memoir scenes?

*Respond your answer here*