Open Studio
A Collection of Art-Making Ideas by Artists

Adam McEwen
“Inventing Fact and Fiction”

Aspen Art Museum
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Activity

An obituary is the written story of someone's life that appears in a newspaper after they die. It's the whole account of their life, from beginning to end, and it's meant to be true. But, of course, it's only one version. There might be many different versions of the same story, depending on who tells it.

Thinking about writing someone’s story is a way of looking at this slippery, complicated, and fun relationship between fact and fiction.

Step 1

Think of a person whose life story you’d like to tell. It could be your hero or heroine, your mom or dad, or a friend—it could be someone you know or a made-up person. It might be that you know the most about yourself, and writing your own life story could be easiest. Start a rough draft, making a list of things that you can use in your story.

Step 2

Write a headline that sums up the person and draws the reader in.

Step 3

Start by writing the obituary with the person's name, and say what they were best known for. Then tell their story from the beginning: where they were born, where they went to school, what kind of a student they were, how they became a fully-grown person.

Think about the difference between what you want to reveal and what you don’t.

You could write two different versions of the same person's story, each focusing on different sides of their character. Which one is truer?
Step 4
To make a poster that looks like a newspaper page, like Adam did, start with finding an image that best represents the person. Print, draw, or paint this image and glue it down on the upper part of a large piece of paper or card. Above it, write the name of the person in big letters followed by the headline below that. Then below that lay out the text. If you want it to look like a printed newspaper, put the text into three columns.

Step 5
To take your project further, try writing your story as it goes into the future. Imagine what happens after you take each step in the story, and what each decision would lead to next. See if your account sounds convincing.

Think about the power of invention, of making up a story. If you write the story in your head and in your imagination, it's halfway to making the story become true.