

# BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

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## The Art of Memoir by Mary Karr

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How do you write about yourself? Improve your scrapbook journaling with advice from a master storyteller.

**QUOTE** | p. XVII - "I once heard Don DeLillo quip that a fiction writer starts with meaning and then manufactures events to represent it; a memoirist starts with events, then derives meaning from them."

**QUESTION** | Have you ever thought of your scrapbooking as memoir?

**QUOTE** | p. XVII - "From the second you choose one event over another, you're shaping the past's meaning."

**QUESTION** | How does this idea make you feel in relation to your scrapbooking?

**QUOTE** | p. XVIII - "Unless you're a doubter and a worrier, a nail-biter, an apologizer, a rethinker, then memoir may not be your playpen. That's the quality I've found most consistently in those life-story writers I've met. Truth is not their enemy. It's the bannister they grab for when feeling around on the dark cellar stairs. It's the solution."

**QUESTION** | Do you identify with this description?

**QUOTE** | p. XX - "In some ways, writing a memoir is knocking yourself out with your own fist, if it's done right. Sure, there's the pleasure of doing work guaranteed to engage you emotionally—who's indifferent to their own history? The form always has profound psychological consequence on its author. It can't not."

**QUESTION** | What is one thing you've learned about yourself from being a scrapbooker?

**QUOTE** | p. 1 - "One minute you're a grown-ass woman, then a whiff of cumin conjures your dad's curry, and a whole door to the past blows open, ushering in uncanny detail."

**QUESTION** | How often do you scrapbook memories from your childhood?

**QUOTE** | p. 1 - "Memory is a pinball in a machine—it messily ricochets around between image, idea, fragments of scenes, stories you've heard."

**QUOTE** | p. 2 - "So a single image can split open the hard seed of the past, and soon memory pours forth from every direction, sprouting its vines and flowers up around you till the old garden's taken shape in all its fragrant glory."

**QUESTION** | Does scrapbooking a single story conjure memories of others?

**QUOTE** | p. 12 - "For the more haunted among us, only looking back at the past can permit it finally to become past."

**QUESTION** | Has scrapbooking helped you process a challenging time or difficult emotions?

**QUOTE** | p. 14 - "The best memoirists stress the subjective nature of reportage. Doubt and wonder come to stand as part of the story."

**QUESTION** | Do you include this sense of speculation in your journaling?

**QUOTE** | p. 31 - “To tap in to your deepest talent, you need to seek out a calm, restful state of mind where your head isn’t defending your delicate ego and your heart can bloom open a little.”

**QUESTION** | Do you have to feel a certain way to get into your scrapbooking?

**QUOTE** | p. 47 - “We don’t see events objectively; we perceive them through ourselves.”

**QUESTION** | From what perspective do you typically tell stories on your pages?

**QUOTE** | p. 62 - “Nabokov loves “twinning”—finding matching patterns in disparate places and laying them together like butterfly wings.”

**QUESTION** | Do you enjoy scrapbooking that draws these kinds of connections?

**QUOTE** | p. 71 - “By carnal, I mean, Can you apprehend it through the five senses? In writing a scene, you must help the reader employ smell and taste and touch as well as image and noise.”

**QUESTION** | Are you interested in providing more carnal detail in your scrapbook journaling?

**QUOTE** | p. 91 - “Mainly, the better memoirist organizes a life story around that aforementioned inner enemy—a psychic struggle against herself that works like a thread or plot engine.”

**QUOTE** | p. 92 - “However random or episodic a book seems, a blazing psychic struggle holds it together, either thematically or in the way a plot would keep a novel rolling forward.”

**QUESTION** | If someone were reviewing your scrapbook albums in the future, would they find an overarching plot to your story?

**QUOTE** | p. 101 - “I often find students in early pages showing themselves exactly opposite from how they actually are.”

**QUESTION** | Do you ever catch yourself embellishing or speaking in a voice that’s not really yours?

**QUOTE** | p. 123 - “Facts are the meat and potatoes of writing—necessary for a meal but devoid of much innate savor.”

**QUESTION** | Do you prefer journaling just the facts or adding something more savory to your page?

**QUOTE** | p. 148 - “If you let yourself tell those smaller anecdotes or stories, the overarching capital-S Story will eventually rise into view.”

**QUESTION** | What have you observed or learned about your life from telling small daily stories, such as through Project Life, Capture 365 or Week in the Life?

**QUOTE** | p. 189 - “Being lost—as I’ve said elsewhere—is a prelude to finding new paths.”

**QUESTION** | Do you ever feel lost as a memory keeper, wondering where to turn next?

**QUOTE** | p. 215 - “In the long run, the revision process feels better if you approach it with curiosity. Each editorial mark can’t register as a “mistake” that threatens the spider ego.”

**QUESTION** | Do you ever pre-write or edit your journaling before finalizing it on your page?

Want to chat about the book? Join us in the My Simple Scrapper community on March 28, 2019 at 8:30 p.m. CST for our discussion.

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