The Memoir Book Club Questions Pack

Truth, Memory & the Life on the Page - discussion cards for the lives told by the people who lived them: what kind of truth was promised, what memory did to it, what the telling owed the other real people in it, and what was left outside the door

Free sample - two real pages from the pack: The Host's Quick-Start (p.3) and The Truth Contract - Set A (p.9, four full cards: TC1 The Promise, Plainly Stated, TC2 Factual Truth, Tested, TC3 Emotional Truth, Tested, TC4 Where the Telling Tests the Promise). The full pack holds 64 cards, 304 questions and 30 pages. Run a real memoir discussion night from the sample alone. Print at 100% on US Letter or A4.

The Host's Quick-Start: A Memoir Discussion Night in Five Moves

Move 1 - The Charters (5 minutes). Read the two lines that protect the night, from the Spoiler Charter & Real-People Charter on page 4: the telling line ("we grade the telling, never the life") and the privacy line ("a member's own similar experience is theirs to offer or to keep, and nobody at this table is a card to be played"). Ask who has finished, without apology from anyone who has not, agree tonight's spoiler ceiling in one sentence, and ask the table's starting question: what did each member already believe about this author, this world or this kind of life before page one - one sentence each, no corrections yet.

Move 2 - The Opener (10 minutes). Play Card AW1 (page 23), the Anywhere opener: place the book on its life line - whose life, which years, and the one scene that now stands for the whole book in your head. Every member can answer, finished or not, and the room learns in ten minutes whether tonight's argument will be about truth, about fairness, or about how a life gets shaped into a story at all.

Move 3 - The Two Sets (35-50 minutes). Play two themed sets chosen for *your* book using the picker in How to Use the Cards (page 5). Default pairing for a first memoir night: The Truth Contract - Set A (page 9) - the pack's signature set - plus whichever of Other People in the Book (page 13), Family Versions (page 19) or The Two Selves (page 12) your book is richest in. Deal the cards round the table; the person holding a card reads its questions aloud and answers first, briefly, before the table opens up.

Move 4 - Scores & the Vote (10 minutes). Fill in the Memoir Scorecard (page 27) line by line, by show of hands where the table splits: believability, self-knowledge, fairness to others, scene craft, structure, and what it left running in you. Then take the vote on page 28 - another life entirely, the same author again, or a life unlike anyone at this table - with the total page count of each candidate and any content the club needs flagged written down *before* anyone votes.

Move 5 - Lightning & the Shelf (10 minutes). Close with one Lightning Round page (pages 25-26) read at pace, answers in one breath, no defences allowed. Transcribe the night's two record lines - the truth-contract verdict from Card TC8 and the trust verdicts from Card CT3, if played - onto Our Club's Memoir Shelf log (page 29), photograph the scorecard for the club chat, and confirm the next meeting date before anyone stands up.

Timing plans. *60 minutes:* Charters 5 - Opener 5 - one set played in full (pick the set your book is richest in) 30 - Scorecard only, vote by show of hands 10 - Lightning, one page only 10. *90 minutes:* the five moves as printed above. *120 minutes:* add a third themed set after Move 3 (Memory & Its Weather, page 11, or Shame, Blame & Forgiveness, page 17, are the richest third sets), a break after Move 3, and both Lightning pages in Move 5.

If the room is quiet: shrink Card MW1 to a single-scene round - everyone names one scene they can still see with the book closed - then ask what made those scenes stick. **If the room is split:** go straight to Card AW7, The Honest Mixed Review, and let the disagreement be the evening; it is a better night than polite agreement. **If the room turns into a fact-checking seminar:** return to the telling - ask what the disputed detail *does in the book*, which is the question this pack always asks second and a search engine never asks at all. **If the room turns confessional:** thank the member who shared, do not top it, and return to the page - the Charter's privacy line protects the next member as much as the last one.

The Truth Contract - Set A

The pack's signature set: every memoir promises some kind of truth - factual, emotional, remembered - before it delivers a single scene. This set asks the table to name the promise precisely, then test the book against its own terms.

TC1 - The Promise, Plainly Stated

Best moment: the opening card of any memoir night - name the contract before you judge it.

1. What kind of truth does this book promise - the truth of record, the truth of memory as it felt, the truth of a lesson drawn afterwards - and where does the book state or imply that promise most clearly?

2. Which early scene taught you how to read the rest - the scene where you learned what this narrator counts as true enough, and what they will openly admit they cannot know?

3. Does the book promise more than any memoir could deliver - total recall, other people's motives, a whole life explained - and does that over-promising read as confidence, as salesmanship, or as the author's genuine belief in their own memory?

4. State the contract in one sentence the whole table can sign, in the form "this book promises _____ and asks us to accept _____ in return" - that sentence governs every verdict tonight.

TC2 - Factual Truth, Tested

Best moment: core - bring checkable claims, not impressions.

1. Name the factual claim in this book you are most confident is accurate - a date, a sequence, a public event, a documented turning - and say what makes you confident: the page's own evidence, an outside account, or the claim's modesty?

2. Name the factual claim you most doubt, and locate the doubt precisely: is it implausible in itself, inconsistent with the book's own earlier telling, or contradicted by something you know from elsewhere?

3. Where the book could have checked a fact and plainly did not, does the error sit harmlessly at the edge of the story or does it hold weight - would correcting it change what the scene argues?

4. How much factual looseness can this particular book afford before its larger claims start paying for it - and has it stayed inside the allowance your answer sets?

TC3 - Emotional Truth, Tested

Best moment: for the defence round - the claim every memoir eventually makes for itself.

1. Name a passage you believe is emotionally true whether or not it happened exactly as written - and say what the passage is true *about*: a feeling, a relationship, a household's weather?

2. What work does the phrase "emotionally true" do at this table - does it rescue a scene from a factual objection, or does it sometimes let a narrator keep the effect of a claim while surrendering its evidence?

3. Where does this book most clearly choose the felt version over the checkable one - a conversation sharpened, a motive clarified in hindsight, a childhood feeling given adult words - and does it signal the choice or slip it past?

4. State the table's rule: when may emotional truth overrule the record in a memoir, and what must the author give the reader in exchange - an admission, a signal, a doubt left visible on the page?

TC4 - Where the Telling Tests the Promise

Best moment: close Set A by finding the strain before Set B judges it.

1. Find the moment the book's telling strains its own contract hardest - a certainty too complete, a scene too shapely, a coincidence of memory too convenient - and describe the strain without yet delivering a verdict.

2. Does the author seem to feel the strain - in a hedge, a joke, a sudden admission, a change of tense or temperature - or does the narration sail through it at full confidence?

3. Which member's reading of that moment is furthest from yours, and what does the distance reveal: different evidence, different experience of similar lives, or a different contract each of you thought you had signed?

4. If the author could add one honest sentence at exactly that strained moment, what sentence would repair the contract for this table - and would the book be better or merely safer with it added?

Host notes - The Truth Contract - Set A: Play Set A before any other themed set on a first memoir night; TC1's signed sentence is cited by every later argument, and TC4's strained moment is the exhibit Set B will judge. Quiet-room rescue: ask TC2's second question round the table, one doubted claim each, no defence required - the room warms itself doubting kindly.