

Writing Your “Class Autobiography”

Write the story of your upbringing in relation to money and class. Consider the most powerful memories and stories. Focus on feelings and relationships. It does not have to be long: aim for three pages. Below are Class Action’s suggested questions for your reflection.

1. Work

When you were growing up, did your parents or the people who raised you:

- Do paid or unpaid work (includes child rearing, volunteer work)
- Work outside/inside the home
- Have a home office or business
- Do skilled work (work requiring special, extended training)
- Do “unskilled” work (work not requiring special, extended training)
- Manual/physical labor
- "Mental" labor (work that primarily involves thinking, working with concepts and interacting with people, such as writing, speaking, planning, accounting, etc.)
- Supervise others
- Have possibilities of advancement/income change over time
- Did children living at home have jobs
- Grandparents or other adult relatives work outside home

2. Education

How far did your parents or the people who raised you go in school?

- Middle school/High school/ Some college education/ Graduated from college/ Advanced degree
- Did you go to public school/private school (religious, prep, other)
- Were you tracked in school?
If yes, how (e.g., academic, vocational)
- Other educational activities outside school setting:
Sports/Musical Instrument/Dance/Religious Training/Other (specify)

3. Income

Where did the income that supported your family come from?

- Salaried position/hourly wages
- Income from family business or farm
- Stocks and bonds
- Inheritance
- Renters or roommates
- Public assistance/welfare
- Social security/veteran’s benefits
- Other (list)

4. In Your Home...

Growing up, did your family have a home?

If you did not have a home:

- were you homeless or did you live in a shelter? For how long?

If you had a home:

How many people lived in your home growing up?

- Children? Adults? How many generations?

When you were growing up did your family live in:

- House/apartment they owned
- "Gated" community
- Rented house/ rented apartment
- Public housing
- Trailer park/housing
- Residential program
- Transient lodging, such as motel
- Other

Would you describe your neighborhood as poor/working class/middle class/upper middle class/upper class/mixed (what mix?)

- How frequently/infrequently did you move
- Did you own/rent a summer home/cabin/other aside from main residence
- Who cleaned your home
- Did you have other "help" (e.g. gardener, nanny)

5. Space and Environment

How much private, personal space did you have growing up?

- Your own bedroom/a shared bedroom
- Room with other family uses during the day
- Group sleeping quarters
- Other (specify)

Were there family photographs in your home?

- Were they framed? Who took them?

Was there original art by family members?

Did you have metal Venetian blinds? Wood blinds? Curtains? Drapes?

6. Clothing

Where did you get most of your clothes and footwear?

- Made at home
- Hand-me-downs
- Used clothing/thrift store
- Discount/grocery/drug store
- Department store
- On sale
- High-fashion or specialized clothing/shoe store

7. Recreation

How was your family's leisure time spent?

- Camping (tent, car, RV)
- Leisure Travel (i.e., not to visit relatives): local/ within U.S./ abroad
- Hobbies (what hobbies?)
- TV
- Movies
- Professional Theatre, concerts, museums, etc.
- Playing games (board games, bridge, poker)
- Reading
- Social time in home with friends and/or extended family
- Religious activities
- Ethnic community activities
- Political activities
- Artistic endeavors (e.g., playing music, pottery)
- Gardening, raising animals
- Other (list)

How did children spend the summer?

- Day or sleep away camp/Vacations/out of town summer home/summer school/of age children working, other children at home

8. Health

- Did your family have health insurance?
 - Privately paid /Job benefit/Government assisted (e.g. state health plan, Medicaid, SSI)
- Did you go to private doctors/government clinics?
- How frequently did you see doctors/dentists (e.g., regular annual visits/in emergencies/not at all)
- Were there chronic illnesses or disabilities?
- Were there alcoholism or drug abuse issues?
- Did a parent or guardian die before the age of 18?

