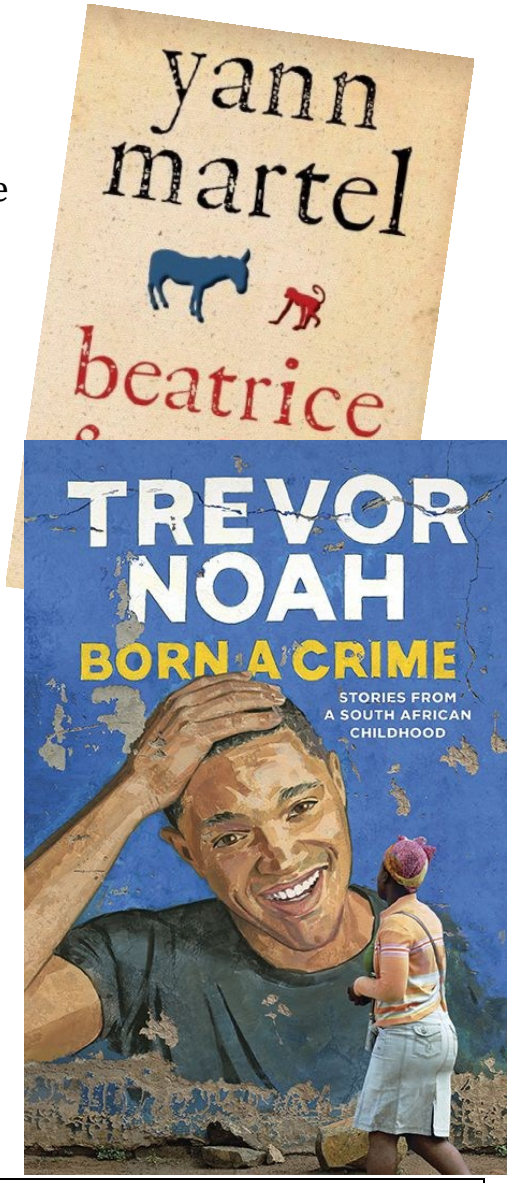
The Nature of History



Art mirrors life.

What does a movie like *Memento* tell us about the very nature of history? What does Canadian author Yann Martel or Irish author Paul Murray say about history in their novels?

Looking at the ideas presented in our class – in at least 300 words – discuss the very nature of history, including the problems it might create for us as historians.

Put simply, I want you to tell me what you think history is, and what problems do historians face in studying it?

Some ideas to consider . . .

- What is history? What is the origin of the world?
- Is it concrete (factual)?
- Who decides what becomes history?
- What do we do with history?
- What problems can history present us with?
- How does language impact our understanding of reality and history?

Resources available to you:

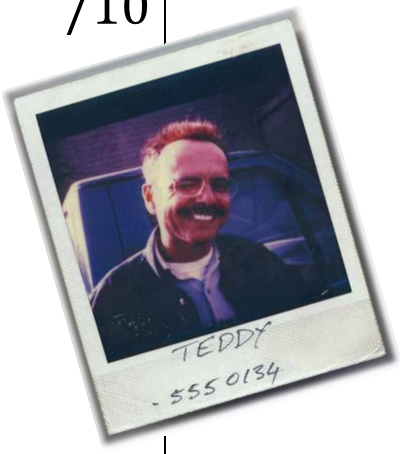
Passages from:	**Movie**:
beatrice & virgil by Yann Martel *1984* by George Orwell *Skippy Dies* by Paul Murray *Born a Crime* by Trevor Noah *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer	Memento (2000) Big Fish (2003) **Ted Talks**: "The Danger of a Single Story" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Overall Expectations met by this assignment:

Strand A

A. Historical Inquiry and Skill Development
Overall Expectations
A1. Historical Inquiry: use the historical inquiry process and the concepts of historical thinking when investigating aspects of world history since the fifteenth century
A2. Developing Transferable Skills: apply in everyday contexts skills developed through historical investigation, and identify careers in which these skills might be useful

The Nature of History Rubric

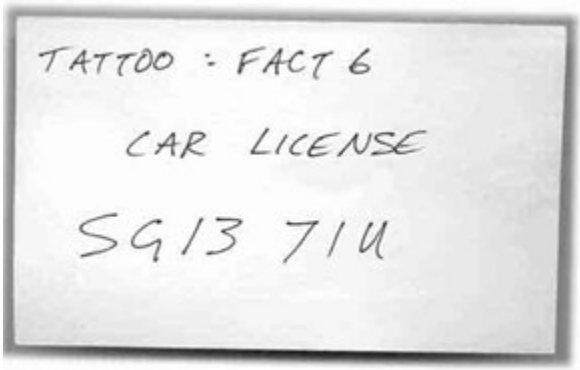
	Below Expectations	Level One	Level Two	Level Three	Level Four
Method of Historical Inquiry and Communication /10 	The content does not reflect that the student understands the concepts this assignment was meant to highlight.	Student's paragraph does not clearly define or analyze what they see as the nature of history, nor does it cite ideas and concepts presented in other sources from the course. There is little evidence that ideas discussed in class and the text has influenced the student's approach to the subject of history.	Student's paragraph defines what they see as the nature of history, attempting to interpret and analyze ideas and concepts presented in *Memento* and 1-2 other sources presented in the course. There is some evidence that ideas discussed in class and the text have influenced the student's approach to the subject of history.	Student's paragraph successfully defines what they see as the nature of history, interpreting and analyzing ideas and concepts presented in *Memento* and other sources presented in the course. The ideas discussed in class and the text have influenced the student's approach to the subject of history.	Student's paragraph successfully defines what they see as the nature of history, interpreting and analyzing ideas and concepts presented in *Memento* and multiple other sources presented in the course, as well as outside examples from class discussions or their own personal experiences. The ideas discussed in class and the texts have influenced the student's approach to the subject of history.
Syntax /5	Syntax is not acceptable.	Syntax is not clear. Many spelling and grammatical errors.	Syntax is somewhat clear. Numerous spelling and grammatical errors.	Syntax is clear. 1-2 spelling and grammatical errors.	Syntax is clear and effective.

Memento

Directed by: Christopher Nolan

Starring: Guy Pearce, Carrie-Ann Moss, Joe Pantoliano

Released: December 15th, 2000

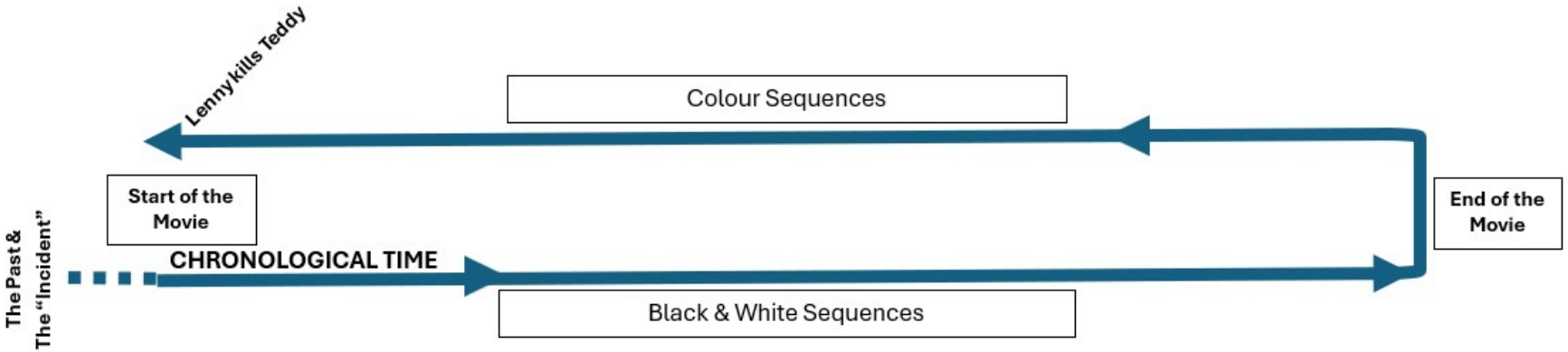


Synopsis:

A memory inside a memory, Memento is a complicated head spinning adventure. Leonard is determined to avenge his wife's murder. However, unable to remember anything that happens day-to-day due to a condition he sustained, short term memory loss, he has to write himself note after note that still don't mean anything after he falls asleep. The film goes back in time to reveal each little bit of the puzzle as he tries to find out the person who killed his wife and makes the audience feel just as confused as he is. The narrative closely follows a phone call Pearce has in which he talks about Sammy Jankis a former client of his who he believed had the same condition. The film takes an unexpected twist as the two characters have a lot more in common than is initially put across.

September 2019, Updated February 2026

Memento Timeline



Notes:

Even if you get revenge, you're not going to remember it . . .

Memories can change the shape of a room, the colour of a car . . .

Memories are an interpretation . . .

Fiction may not be real, but it is true . . .

Don't trust other people's notes and scribbles . . .

If history doesn't become story, it dies to everyone except the historian . . .