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English II

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# THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X

As told to Alex Haley

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## My Autobiographical Theory

By: Amy Hissom



In my opinion, an autobiography should include anything and everything that could possibly make me understand the subject of the autobiography. First and foremost, who is the person and where did they come from. If I am interested in reading the autobiography of a certain individual, it is because maybe I want to know what is so special about that person. I might also read a person's autobiography because that person went through the same things in life I went through and I want to know how they handled it. Will it help my situation? I want to know what makes that person who he or she is today. I want to know all the facts of that person's life so that I can more clearly understand the events that made them who they are. I feel that nothing should be left out even if it is down right ugly. Tell me about how your father molested you or how you sold drugs. Can your story help others from going through the same ordeal? Tell me about your religious beliefs. I want to know what caused you to believe in that

certain religion, especially if it is the same religion I practice. I don't care if you are a famous person or just an average individual off the street. Does your story impact the lives of others? I want to know. Did you change history or dedicate your life to God? If so, why? What events of your life led to the decisions you have made? I believe that everybody has a story to tell and everybody is important. I don't believe that anybody has or has had a perfect life. I believe that everybody has skeletons in their closets, which once revealed, will help me understand that person better. In my eyes, autobiographies are written for a number of different reasons. Some are written to act as a healing process for the individual who is writing it. It can also be a healing process for the reader who reads it, especially if the subject at hand has went through the same thing the reader is going through in life. I believe that an autobiography can also be a teaching tool, not only for the person writing it, but also for others who read it. It can be a preserver of family history. The list can go on and on. The more you add to your autobiography, the better I will understand you and what you are trying to say. Tell me about your feelings and thoughts about yourself and others and why you feel and think that way.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X, as told to and written by Alex Haley, covers a lot of these areas, if not all of them. In the beginning chapters of this book, Malcolm talks about the terrible events his family went through when he was young. He explains how he felt his father favored him above all his siblings because of the lightness of his skin, but his mother was the opposite. She didn't like light skin. Malcolm includes that his mother's father was a white man who raped her mother. Some people would think that this is a part of somebody's life that should not be included in an autobiography for the world to read. I disagree. This part of the book helped me to see what terrible things that African American women went through in this

country. He tells the story of his father's death and how three of his father's siblings died at the hands of white men. He talks about how their home was burnt down and how the Klu Klux Klan would pay visits to them. He talks a lot about the white people in his life that steered him away from being the best that he could be. He held the highest grades in his class when he told his English teacher, Mr. Ostrowski, that he wanted to be a lawyer. Mr. Ostrowski was great at encouraging the white students to be all that they could be, but that was not the case for Malcolm. He told Malcolm that he had to be realistic about being a nigger and that being a lawyer is no realistic goal for a nigger. This is just one of the events that happened in Malcolm's life that led him to hate white people. This made Malcolm feel very uneasy towards this particular person who was white. This goes back to my theory that an autobiography should include the subject's feelings toward others who have had some type of effect on his or her life. This particular person, along with others and the Nation of Islam, helped Malcolm decide that all white people are bad. In telling this part of his story, I understand him more. This also shows me how, back then there was not much opportunity for the black man. This problem caused the black man to use his skills for bad things instead of good things because that was the only choice they were given. This is what caused Malcolm to be a hustler, pimp, drug dealer and eventually an addict.

Malcolm's story includes explicit details of his life in crime and how it led him to prison. He had to tell the bad details of his life so as to make the reader understand his change from bad to good. Once in prison he is introduced to the Nation of Islam, which to me was a good thing in a sense. It gave Malcolm something better to put his energy into instead of crime. Now he is fighting for the rights of the black race. This part of Malcolm's life also had lessons to be

learned. He tells in detail how the Nation of Islam teaches that the white people are “blue-eyed devils”. He is now teaching the blacks that whites are racists against them, and at the same time teaching the blacks to be racists against whites. He tells how he believed so strongly in a man. This man was Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm believed in this man so much that he would have died for him. In admitting this in his book, he is leading us up to the point where he sees his mistake in believing in this man. When it was a proven fact that Elijah Muhammad was not practicing what he preached, Malcolm realized that one should not put his faith in a man; he should put it in Allah (God). He worshiped Elijah Muhammad as if he were God. Malcolm tells how he is thrown out of the Nation of Islam and about the threats on his life. In telling all the details of this part of his life, Malcolm is showing us what led him to change his beliefs again, and this time even for the better. After visiting the Holy land of Mecca, Malcolm realized what it is to be a true Muslim and sees a place where white people are untainted by racism. This changes his idea that the white man is evil. He has realized that the race problem is in America and believes that the colorblindness of Islam is the solution to eliminating it.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X is a perfect example of my Autobiographical Theory. In telling every graphic detail of the good and bad points of his life in order that they happened, showed me how he was constantly growing as a person. His childhood stories of his father, the welfare system breaking up the family after his father’s death, his mother being placed in a mental institution as a result, school and the teachers who discouraged him, are all important factors that helped me understand what led Malcolm to a life of crime. The detailed stories of his crime life and prison, along with the early stories, are all important factors that helped me to

understand why Malcolm changed his way of life to support and believe in the Nation of Islam. All his stories of Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam and Malcolm's trips to Mecca helped me understand how Malcolm finally found what was right and good. After reading this book, I feel that Malcolm truly was a great man who not only wanted the best for his people, but also wanted the best for all people. Too many people today still feel that he was a radical leader that taught hate. Maybe at one point in his life he was and did and can you really blame him? He changed! Read the book and you will see!