

## Story of Self: “Go Carolina” by David Sedaris



**What is this?** Excerpts from an essay that appears in Sedaris’s personal essay collection *Me Talk Pretty One Day* (2000).

### Text:

The agent came for me during a geography lesson. She entered the room and nodded at my fifth-grade teacher, who stood frowning at a map of Europe. What would needle me later was the realization that this had all been pre-arranged. My capture had been scheduled to go down at exactly 2:30 on a Thursday afternoon. The agent would be wearing a dung-colored blazer over a red knit turtleneck, her heels sensibly low in case the suspect should attempt a quick getaway.

“David,” the teacher said, “this is Miss Samson, and she’d like you to go with her now.”

“Our goal is to work together until eventually you can speak correctly,” Agent Samson said. She made a great show of enunciating her own sparkling s’s, and the effect was profoundly irritating. “I’m trying to help you, but the longer you play these little games the longer this is going to take.”

None of the speech therapy students were girls. They were all boys like me who kept movie star scrapbooks and made their own curtains. “You don’t want to be doing that,” the men in our families would say. “That’s a girl thing.” Baking scones and cupcakes for the school janitors, watching *Guiding Light* with our mothers, collecting rose petals for use in a fragrant potpourri: anything worth doing turned out to be a girl thing. In order to enjoy ourselves, we learned to be duplicitous. Our stacks of *Cosmopolitan* were topped with an unread issue of *Boy’s Life* or *Sports Illustrated*, and our decoupage projects were concealed beneath the sporting equipment we never asked for but always received.

When I first began my speech therapy, I worried that the Agent Samson plan might work for everyone but me, that the other boys might strengthen their lazy tongues, turn their lives around, and leave me stranded. Luckily my fears were never realized. Despite the woman’s best efforts, no one seemed to make any significant improvement. The only difference was that we were all a little quieter.

## Part 1: Analysis

Read through the story of self above and then answer the questions below.

**Text:** "Go Carolina" by David Sedaris



1. What aspect of **selfhood** is this writer focusing on?

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2. What are the **moments** or **events** they focus on in relation to that aspect of selfhood?

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3. What is the **tone** of this piece? Or, how does this writer **feel** about the aspect of selfhood they are writing about?

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4. What **details** and **images** they use to communicate that tone/feeling?

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5. What are **three words** you would use to describe this writer, based on this piece of writing? What can you tell about their personality, values, or passions?

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## Part 2: Write-alike

A write-alike is an exercise in which you take inspiration from the format, structure, and themes of a piece of writing, but replace the original content with your own.

### The Original:

“Go Carolina” is a prose essay in first-person about how Sedaris learned to hide his sexuality because enforced speech therapy at school made it clear to “boys like him” that they were not accepted as they were.

### Questions To Think About For Your Write-alike:

- What’s an aspect of yourself that you have felt pressured to hide, suppress, or change?
- What are some particular moments you can think of in which it became clear that this aspect of yourself was not accepted? What are particular strategies you devised or discovered to cope?

### Starters For Your Write-alike:

One way you might begin your write-alike is by imitating Sedaris’s line, “In order to enjoy ourselves, we learned to be duplicitous.”

You could start by writing, “In order to be myself , I learned to \_\_\_\_\_.”

Then continue with your story.

### Examples:

To find examples for this exercise, visit [www.storiesofselfworkshop.com/writing\\_samples.html](http://www.storiesofselfworkshop.com/writing_samples.html)

- Gayatri’s “Go Carolina” write-alike

### Your Turn:

Set a timer for 15 minutes and go!



A large rectangular area containing horizontal lines for writing, spanning most of the page's width and height.