

“I Remember”

Excerpted from
*Poetry Everywhere: Teaching Poetry
Writing in School and in the Community*
by Jack Collom and Sheryl Noethe

"I REMEMBER" POEMS, by artist and writer Joe Brainard *I Remember* (Granary Books, 2001)

- I remember the only time I ever saw my mother cry. I was eating apricot pie.**
- I remember how much I used to stutter.**
- I remember the first time I saw television. Lucille Ball was taking ballet lessons.**
- I remember Aunt Cleora who lived in Hollywood. Every year for Christmas she sent my brother and me a combined present of only one book.**
- I remember a very poor boy who had to wear his sister's blouses to school.**
- I remember shower curtains with angel fish on them.**

DETAIL

TO DO: WRITE!

- "I remember ... ," followed by what you remember-it can be anything, from the day you were born to this morning. Describe as many memories as you want.
- Concentrate on each one long enough to bring out its specialness.
- It doesn't have to be "important"; we're just getting some flavor of real life here.
- Shorthand things such as "I remember my first bike" -- period, end of memory -- are boring, tedious and generic.
- Flesh out your memories with the *detail* that was part of the original experience: colors, exact names, unusual focuses.
- Tell just what it was that made it stick in your mind.
- **Make it real.**

I remember being showered in the wilderness by hot embers from a blazing fire sent into the air by an exploding can of cream-style corn.

Jim Bates (high school)

I remember a wild stallion rearing like
magic through the wild river.

I remember a plane taking me through
clouds of visions.

I remember a star flashing red and blue in
the dark breeze.

I remember a cloud that looked like a
beautiful dragon in disguise.

I remember a wolf large enough to ride
but it dashed away slicing snow.

Shauna Goosman (5th grade)

Variant:

See if there's a possible play between early memories and more recent ones. These memories cast light on life changes.

I remember when I was in kindergarten my teacher said, "Cut on the lines." I was cutting wobbly. Henry said, "I'm telling 'cause you aren't cutting on the lines." I said, "Who cares?" Then he told the teacher. She said, "You don't have to cut exactly on the lines, Henry."

Patrick Tindall (2nd grade)

EXERCISE

Concentrate on a single memory. In this case you should spend even more time talking up detail. This kind of I Remember is like a family photo, in which one sees not only Aunt Myrt picking pears but also the tree branches, the broken fence next door, half a black dog, the sky, an empty can of Van Camp's Pork 'n' Beans, etc.

I remember when I was moving from Wyoming in our gray Blazer. We were about halfway and our Blazer broke down. We stopped at this stinky car shop to have it fixed. They worked on it for a while. It was late at night. We were travelling for a while and I got carsick and threw up all over the place. My mom had an old red sweatshirt on. Our Blazer wasn't working too well again. We were getting tired. My mom and dad brought us to a church to sleep for a while. My dad left to find a place to fix the Blazer. The next thing I knew I saw a dead cat on the side of the road and there was a magpie flying in the bright blue sky. We drove up to the old swampy house. I could not believe that was our old house.

Tammy Taylor(5th grade)

ASSIGNMENT:

Directions

- Do not focus on one period of your life. Include everything.
- Include no fewer than 5 *I Remembers* that are full paragraphs that include detail, detail, detail! What were sights, smells, sounds, how did it feel, taste; what were the sensations?
- Re-tell one of your *I Remembers* for the class.

Write down to turn in:

- 1. What happens in this story?*
- 2. Who's in it?*
- 3. What do they do?*
- 4. What happens to them?*
- 5. What do they want?*
- 6. What's in their way?*
- 7. How do they succeed, or why do they fail?*

Breaking down how stories work can help you more easily recognize the elements of narrative – and opportunities for narrative – in your own pieces. Have fun!

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- **Listen for character and write down:**
 - who the story is about
 - what you learn about him/her
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- **Listen for the story arc and write down:**
 - where the story begins
 - where the story changes
 - where the story ends
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- **Listen for description. Note three instances of description.**
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- **Listen for dialogue. How do the characters talk?**
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- **Characterize the narrative voice – the storyteller’s delivery. Is it playful? Formal? Breathless? Somber? Some of each?**
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