

I Remember You: Memory Composition Activity

Image Generator: Composing a Memory

As in Hayden's fourteen line poem, which uses the dominant image of a self-sacrificing father tending a fire and polishing his son's shoes, certain memories of a loved one are often shorthand for much of what we feel and think about the person.

Select a person, someone with whom you have had an intense encounter or a deeply emotional relationship. Think of people who helped you, protected you, taught you, comforted you, or cheered you.

Take one memory of that person and recompose it now, as a work of art. The event that you choose should be a close-up of a single moment or an image you have seen over and over again, no more than one hour long. For example, if you want to write about the person who helped you learn to ride a bike, focus in on a specific memory, perhaps the day the training wheels came off, and write about it in as much sensory detail as possible.

You can start by simply recording as many concrete sensory details about the image as possible. Try to use all five senses. You may use these sentence starters to gather sensory details that you will later shape and mold into a finished piece.

I saw...

I smelled...

I tasted (or "could taste the")...

I heard...

I felt (not emotions, but physical sensations)...

Remember, at this point, you are generating images through a process of recalling a memory unique to your experience. No one else can write this memory as it uniquely yours. You may shape and alter these images later to suit your artistic goals. Write pages and pages if you like. Don't worry about form yet, just write!

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Revision Strategy: Revising through Sonic Patterns

Use the following steps to begin the process of moving from a list of images to a more finished piece.

Step 1 Go back to the images you have generated and circle words, phrases, and images that capture this person's essence and this event most concisely. Which ones are most vivid? Which are most telling of the kind of person you are writing about?

Step 2 Take the images you have circled and arrange them and rearrange them. Pare down what you have written to a few essential images. Aim for 14 lines or sentences at most. **TRY TO INCLUDE AT LEAST ONE IMAGE WITH A SOUND.**

Step 3 Read your piece aloud, exaggerating the sounds of your words. Consider the sounds that are repeated. Do any sounds seem to recur throughout the piece? Mark these patterns and variations as you go. Use a different highlighter or marking for each sound so you can physically see the patterns you have consciously and unconsciously begun to develop. In short, use your mouth, your ears, and your eyes see what your words have already given you.

Alternate Step 3 If you have no repetition, choose 1-2 images or phrases that you might consider hot spots in the poem, related parts to which you would like to draw attention. See if there is any possibility for highlighting these phrases or images through sound. Could a change in word choice create a connection through consonant sounds or vowel sounds?

Caution As you consider possible revisions that might enhance these patterns, you should also keep in mind that good writing isn't about engineering sound to reinforce meaning. This strategy for revision offers only one way to think about how the elements of a text can come together on multiple levels. As a writer, you have to make decisions about how to balance the beauty of the spontaneous phrase with artful revision, because all too often, too much of a good thing doesn't work.

In the end, you have to remember the wisdom of the great poet William Carlos Williams, "If it ain't a pleasure, it ain't a poem!"