

Poetry Prompts & Assignments for Teachers

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The "I Remember" Poem

What you'll need: Pen, paper.

Minimum time required for this exercise: 45 minutes (and maybe one night)

Directions: This is based on Joe Brainard's book length poem called *I Remember* (Granary Books, 2001), which was about 100 pages of nothing but memories from his life, all of them beginning with the words "I remember." A full poem would be about a dozen memories of varying lengths. Some can be more than one sentence. None should get too involved in a story. Stick with the specific details. "I remember punching Dr. D'Angelo in the stomach the year before he was my 5th grade English teacher. He let us all punch him, one by one, because he was wearing some kind of Japanese body armor. He said it was a good punch."

Consider the things you might want to write about: I remember . . .

- a person
- a detail about a person
- a specific place (like a hiding place or a corner of a tree house)
- a smell
- the shape of something
- an event
- an inanimate object that may have witnessed an event
- the quality of air or light that day

Here's a tip: If you want to write about a person, it's better to soon switch to one of the other things on the list than to continue to talk directly about the person. Consider the difference between these two short memories:

1. "I remember my first grade teacher Mr. Weber. He was very nice."
2. "I remember the small glass frog my first grade teacher had on his desk."

The memories should be about different times in your life. Make one about something that happened in the last 24 hours. Make another be one of the earliest memories you have. Everything else should be about different things that happened in between.

What will these poems be about? They will be about you, what's important to you, and about memory itself. As a seventh grade girl once said, "If I remember it, then it must have been important to me."