

A List Poem Of Memories Using The Device Of Repetition

In this writing exercise, students will recall memorable people, events, pets, places, objects, and feelings in their lives and list them with the use of repetitive words at the beginning of each memory. This exercise calls on students to focus on the details that have shaped their lives up to this time. It is an experience in which students have the opportunity to become totally absorbed in their poems in a personal way. The device of repetition enables them to keep the flow of memories moving and building comfortably on the page. Students often comment on the fact that they hadn't thought about these parts of their lives in a long time. When a student shares a finished poem, the teacher and classmates are often pleasantly surprised to learn something new about the writer.

- 1) Begin by asking students to close their eyes and visualize themselves in a particular place. Tell them it could be a place they are familiar with now or when they were younger. Specify different places (kitchen, garage, yard, grocery store, playground, beach, woods, park, barn, car, etc.), then ask them to remember something that happened when they were in one of those places.
- 2) Take responses and list them on the board, starting each line with "The day...." or "The time...." The poem might start building this way: "The day I walked barefoot along the tide line at Clallam Bay and almost stepped on a jellyfish /The day we found our cat on top of the shed with a mouse in her mouth..." Point out the brevity of each memory and tell students that they will not be telling the whole story, just enough to let us visualize the event and get a feeling for it.
- 3) For variety ask students to include sad memories as well as happy ones. This can be an uneasy or risky area for some, but it is important to allow students to include these memories since they are integral parts of the self. It can also broaden their understanding that poetry is not only about beautiful and happy things, but is inclusive of a very wide range of issues. To accomplish this, you could volunteer the next line and jot down a sad memory of your own as the next part of the collaborative poem.
- 4) This would be a good time to have students work individually on their own poems. Give them 20-30 minutes to write and culminate the session with a sharing time. If time is short (some poems might be long), have each student choose one memory to share.

For revision purposes some students might want to rearrange lines for chronology, although that isn't a necessary component of this poem. However, a good suggestion would be to have them look at their poems and decide if there is one line that stands out as a good beginning line and another that would be good to bring to the end to give this list poem a finished feeling.

This format is a good one to use again for an end-of-the-year exercise. Students could write a collaborative poem listing things that happened throughout the year in school. For high school seniors it could be considered a "yearbook poem" listing memorable events of their high school years.

Other adaptations would be to suggest a different beginning for each line, focusing more specifically on particular persons, e.g. the friend, the teacher, etc. Students who have lived

in many different places could write about the town, or the house, or the apartment,” etc. Another focus could be an object such as the book, the hat, etc. No matter the focus, the exercise is valuable as a personal inventory of the student’s life.

Sample Poems:

The day I learned how to type my name on the computer
The day we adopted a baby starling that fell out of its nest
The day I saw a Cooper’s Hawk on the high Douglas-fir branch
The day I held my baby sister for the first time
The day a coyote chased a rabbit in our front yard
The day I saw a flock of snow geese feeding in a cornfield
The day I made a homerun in Hanson’s Field
The day my mom cut off the tip of her thumb slicing an onion
The day I started collecting seashells when I found a checkered periwinkle
The day my dad moved to Colorado in his pickup
The day my big brother left for college and broke my heart
The day my dog died and I couldn’t stop crying

Collection of lines by students in 1st through 10th grades

The Boat

The boat my dad built in the living room
The boat I used as a playpen
The boat I helped paint green
The boat I out-fished Grandpa in
The boat that leaked rain into my bunk
The boat I almost fell out of
The boat that rides wakes like a surfboard
The boat I bought for \$5.00
The boat we now use as a wading pool
The boat full of cobwebs
The boat without a name
The boat we just finished building
The boat that will sail around the world
My boat

Beth Huffington, 10th grade

