**My Papa’s Waltz**

By [Theodore Roethke](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/theodore-roethke)

**Directions: Read the poem once to yourself, annotating in the margins your thoughts, questions, connections that come to mind as you read. Capture your thinking!**

The whiskey on your breath

Could make a small boy dizzy;

But I hung on like death:

Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans

Slid from the kitchen shelf;

My mother’s countenance

Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist

Was battered on one knuckle;

At every step you missed

My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head

With a palm caked hard by dirt,

Then waltzed me off to bed

Still clinging to your shirt.

**Answer the following questions.**

1. What is Roethke trying to show about this memory?
2. How do you know? What details and images develop this tone?
3. Read the poem again, and underline what verbs give you these positive or negative feelings. How do they show what’s going on? Add adjectives to your annotations in the margins that capture his tone.
4. What literary/poetic devices support the meaning? Explain how they create meaning.

Theodore Roethke, “My Papa’s Waltz” from *Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke.* Copyright 1942 by Hearst Magazines, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc.

Source: *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (1961)

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# CREATE a poem in response to “My Papa’s Walz”

Task: write your own spinoff poem on a strong memory/experience you have with one or both of your parents. You decide if it’s positive or negative. Use this format to help you plan your writing:

1. What feeling do you want to capture about the event?
2. List 5 verbs that do NOT show the feeling (e.g. if it’s a pleasant memory, do not use verbs like HATE, CRUSHED, SCALDED, SNAPPED, or SLAUGHTERED)
3. List 5 verbs involved in the event to show the feeling (e.g. a pleasant memory would use verbs like GLISTENED, WARMED, ENVELOPED, CARRESSED, SMOOTHED)
4. Write four stanzas. Each stanza should use one or two of the verbs—and additional descriptions—to narrate the event and show your meaning.
5. Please type it and print it out if you can.

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