

TAKING VIOLIN AT SCHOOL: A Poem And A Writing Exercise

TAKING VIOLIN AT SCHOOL
by April Halprin Wayland

I open my case
tighten my bow
pluck a string to tune.
I love to listen to it chirp across the echoing room.

My friends are in class
reading about
a famous English king.
But I am training this wooden bird upon my arm to sing.

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COMING IN FOR A LANDING—A Novel in Poems (Knopf 2002)

About writing this poem:

My teacher, Myra Cohn Livingston, gave us an assignment to write poems about music.

First, I wrote down as quick memories of music that I could. A list of maybe 24 ideas. From those, I chose the topic "taking violin at school."

Then, I wrote, wrote, wrote, wrote, wrote: about leaving class, walking down into the dark basement with the violin case banging my leg, listening to my teacher, Sherman Plepler teach us, and my favorite session--when he played his violin for us and showed us all of the animals and other instruments he could make it sound like.

After that, I cut, cut, cut, cut, cut until I came up with this poem.

A Poetry Writing Exercise Based on Taking Violin At School:

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name: _____ date: _____

LANGUAGE THAT SINGS

**P.S.—POETRY SPILL—WRITING A MUSIC POEM--a language arts activity
by April Halprin Wayland**

Make a list of at least five memories--specific experiences you've had with music.

Circle one of those memories above.

Focusing on this one memory, list as many details about this topic as you can. It doesn't have to be a poem yet. This is just what my teacher, Myra Cohn Livingston, called the "raw spillage of emotion". Write as much as you can. You can use the back of the page, too. You don't have to write in complete sentences. You don't have to write neatly.

Include all of the senses in this spilling: what did you see? Hear? Smell? Taste? Feel?

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Now-circle just a small part of all of this spilling to use in your poem.

Your poem does not have to rhyme. But it can. You may choose to copy the rhyming pattern of my poem. Or copy the rhyming pattern of someone else's poem you like.

Play with metaphors. My violin became a wooden bird. What metaphor works for your musical memory?

My voice is like a _____
My trombone became a _____
My _____ is like a _____

Re-write it until it's just the way you like it.

Read the poem aloud as you re-write. Do you like the sound of it?
Poetry is word music.

Do you like your poem? Do not hide your light under a bushel. Your poem is a gift to be shared. Share it.

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