

Story of Self: “daddy this time” by Jacqueline Woodson

What is this? A poem from Woodson’s memoir-in-verse, *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014)

Text:

Greenville is different this summer,

Roman is well and out back, swinging hard. Somewhere
between last summer and now, our daddy
cemented the swing set down.

Roman doesn’t know the shaky days--just this moment,
his dark blue Keds pointing toward the sky,
his laughter and screams, like wind
through the screen door.

Now my grandmother shushes him,
Daddy resting in the bedroom, the covers pulled up
to his chin,
his thin body so much smaller than I remember it.

Just a little tired, Daddy says to me, when I tiptoe
in with chicken soup,
sit on the edge of the bed and try to get him
to take small sips.

He struggles into sitting, lets me feed him
small mouthfuls but only a few
are enough. Too tired to eat anymore.
Then he closes his eyes.

Outside, Roman laughs again and the swing set
whines with the weight of him.
Maybe Hope is there, pushing him
into the air. Or maybe it’s Dell.
The three of them would rather be outside.

His room smells, my sister says.
But I don’t smell anything except the lotion
I rub into my grandfather’s hands.

When the others aren't around, he whispers,
 You're my favorite,
smiles and winks at me. You're going to be fine,
 you know that.
Then he coughs hard and closes his eyes, his breath
struggling to get
into and out of his body.

Most days, I am in here with my grandfather,
 holding his hand
while he sleeps
fluffing pillows and telling him stories
about my friends back home.
When he asks, I speak to him in Spanish,
the language that rolls off my tongue
like I was born knowing it.
Sometimes, my grandfather says,
Sing me something pretty.
And when I sing to him, I'm not
just left of the key or right of the tune.
He says I sing beautifully.
He says I am perfect.

Part 1: Analysis

Read through the story of self above and then answer the questions below.

Text: "daddy this time" by Jacqueline Woodson



1. What aspect of **selfhood** is this writer focusing on?

2. What are the **moments** or **events** they focus on in relation to that aspect of selfhood?

3. What is the **tone** of this piece? Or, how does this writer **feel** about the aspect of selfhood they are writing about?

4. What **details** and **images** they use to communicate that tone/feeling?

5. What are **three words** you would use to describe this writer, based on this piece of writing? What can you tell about their personality, values, or passions?

Part 2: Write-alike

A write-alike is an exercise in which you take inspiration from the format, structure, and themes of a piece of writing, but replace the original content with your own.

The Original:

“daddy this time” is a free-verse poem focused on the relationship between the speaker and her grandfather.

Questions To Think About For Your Write-alike:

- What is a defining relationship in your life? Who makes you feel the way the speaker of this poem does in the presence of her grandfather -- cherished, un-self-conscious, important, able to do difficult things?
- When you close your eyes, what are moments with that person that come to mind? What are sensory details you can remember from those moments?

Starters For Your Write-Alike:

One way to start your write-alike could be to imitate Woodson’s final lines:

He says I sing beautifully.
He says I am perfect.

Replace the “He” with the pronoun or name of the person you chose, and change the details for your own. For example:

She says I’m funny.
She says I’m special.

And then continue your poem from there.

Examples:

To find examples for this exercise, visit www.storiesofselfworkshop.com/writing_samples.html

- Faiza’s “daddy this time” write-alike

Your Turn:

Set a timer for 15 minutes and go!



A large rectangular area containing 25 horizontal lines for writing, spanning most of the page's width and height.