

1. List the objects in your bedroom or living room. Write a poem describing them and telling a little of their—and your—history.
2. Write about a gift your family, or someone in it, gave you. It might be an actual gift—a baseball glove, a book, a necklace—or a more intangible one. Talk about how that gift was or could be transferred to another, passed on.
3. Everyone of a certain age remembers where they were when John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Think about where you were when some major event occurred; write a poem that draws a parallel between something in your life and the event.
4. Compare an actual family photograph to one that was never taken, but might have been. Describe both photographs—the real and the imagined one—in detail.
5. Take a newspaper account of an incident—a riot, an assassination, a bombing— or an event in history and imagine that you are one of the participants. Rewrite the account as a first-person poem, using some of the details from the account.
6. Is there a particular person in your family with whom you feel in conflict? If so, write a poem in that person's voice, describing the relationship between you. Experience the other person's reality and way of seeing things, and then try to render that in the poem.
7. The traditional imagery for good and evil is light and dark, white and black. Brainstorm a list of images called up by the two opposites, light/white and black/dark. Then write a poem that inverts and reverses those traditional associations. That is, what is beautiful, fertile, inspiring in the dark, in night, in deep caves? What's awful or terrifying in daylight?
8. Describe an object that you associate with a particular family member. It might be a baby blanket, a bathrobe, a hearing aid, a pair of eyeglasses, a black dress, anything that calls up that person for you. Talk about that object and, through your description of this person's use of it, create a portrait of his or her character.
9. Use a family anecdote, or a family ritual, as a leaping-off point for saying something about how your family or the world works. Example: Louise Glück's "Spite and Malice" in *Ararat*, which uses a card game to talk about the dynamics of the family.

10. Imagine that your shadow has a name, a face, certain habits, likes and dislikes. Describe your shadow. Then describe what your shadow's reactions are to a particular action you perform—such as doing your homework, going for a walk, writing a poem.

11. Is there a particular image, a particular moment, that seems to capture the essential spirit or character of someone in your family? Jot down an image, or a moment, for each person in your family. Pick the one that has the most energy for you, and begin a poem with that image.

12. Remember John Lennon's "Imagine"? What would your ideal world look like? Write a poem that begins, "Imagine ... " and let yourself dream. Remember, though, that you'll need to stay specific—"Imagine no war" sounds great in a song, but won't cut it as poetry. How would "no war" look in concrete terms? Offer an alternative vision. You don't need to cover everything that's wrong in the world; choose one thing, to start.

13. What kind of character seems most foreign to you—a homeless man? A suburban housewife? A Zen monk? Whoever it is, that's the persona to adopt. Find a way to enter that character's experience, and write a poem in his or her voice.

14. Write a poem in first-person singular about something that happened to somebody else; tell it as though it happened to you.

15. Research a period of history that interests you, and write a poem like a person who lived during that time.

16. Take something that happened to you, and tell it in third person

17. Write a poem in the voice of a famous person, living or dead. Try to give the reader an intimate glimpse of this person, one that couldn't be gotten from the media or history books.

18. Write a poem in the voice of someone in your family. It might be one of your parents talking about their lives or how they met; a brother or sister describing some family gathering. If you want, you can include yourself as a person in the poem—seen, of course, from the speaker's perspective.

19. Write a "negative simile" poem: "It wasn't like _____ , or _____"
20. Take an image from a film, something that impressed itself on your memory, and write about it. Describe the image or scene and then try to talk about why it made such an impression.
21. It is said that our sense of smell is the most primitive, that a scent can take us back instantly into a memory. Jot down some smells that are appealing to you. For each one, describe the memory or experience associated with that smell, making sure you bring in the other senses in your description. Write a poem for each smell. For starters, you might title each poem with the triggering smell: "Roses," "Chanel No. 5," "Garlic," etc. Do the same for smells that you particularly dislike.
22. Most of us, as children, had a secret hiding place or a favorite spot to get away from our families and our ordinary lives. It might have been a spot in the woods, a fort in the yard or basement, or the roof of the house. Write about your place and, if possible, a particular event/incident you recall that made you seek it out.
23. Make a list of all the places you've traveled to that you can remember with any vividness; make a second list of places where you'd like to go. Now brainstorm images—remembered or imagined—for these places. (Your images for Paris might include snow on iron benches in the Tuilleries, cats in the cemetery at Pere Lachaise, croissants piled in a basket on a cafe table.) Write a poem that includes some of the places you've been, and at least one place you haven't. Find a common thread to connect the past and future: an emotion, a desire, a particular person.