

**Lesson: Our Families**  
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## **Lesson — Our Families**

### **Use of the Five Senses in Writing Poetry**

In **Lesson** we're going to learn how to write poems using our five senses. We will be writing about our families.

#### **Step 1**

First I want you to carefully read my poem, “**My Grandma’s Songs.**” In this poem I wanted to express what was special to me about my grandmother. One way I do this when I write is to use some of the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Poets often use the senses in order to express their feelings.

### **My Grandma’s Songs**

would follow  
the beat of  
the washing machine

turning  
our kitchen  
into a dance floor

consoling  
the chairs placed  
upside down

delighting  
the family portraits  
on the walls

putting to sleep  
the sheets  
on the clothesline

giving flavor  
to the boiling pot  
of beans

the songs  
my grandma  
used to sing

could make  
the stars  
come out

could turn  
my grandma  
into a young girl

going back  
to the river  
for water

and make her  
laugh and cry  
at the same time

This poem is from a book of mine titled *Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems/Jitomates risueños y otros poemas de primavera* (Children's Book Press, 1997).

Read this poem a second time and respond to the following questions:

- what sense could the title refer to?
- where does the sense of smell appear?
- do the other senses appear? Where?
- what image do they give you of my grandma?

Although I didn't include a direct reference to the sense of touch in this poem, can you think of something I could have put in the poem that would show the sense of touch?

## Useful Vocabulary

Poems usually include **poetic lines** and **stanzas**. **Poetic lines** or **verses** are the lines in which poems are written and **stanzas** are the sections formed by these lines.

Read this poem again and respond to the following questions:

- how many stanzas are in this poem?
- how many lines does each stanza have?
- in what way do stanzas look alike?
- why do you think this could be important in poetry?

## Step 2

Now read carefully the poem titled “**My Grandma Is An Angel**” that comes from my book, *Angels Ride Bikes and Other Fall Poems* (Children’s Book Press, 1999)

### My Grandma Is An Angel

I learned Spanish from my grandma	when she’d say chubby boy” she’d laugh	in her eyes her braids her voice
“ <i>mijito</i> don’t cry” she’d tell me	with my grandma I learned to count clouds	I’d see them touch them smell them
when my parents would leave	to recognize mint leaves in flowerpots	one day I was told “she went far away”
to work at the fish canneries	my grandma wore moons on her dress	but still I feel her next to me
I’d fall asleep in her arms once again	Mexico’s deserts ocean	whispering in my ear: “my little son”

Read this poem a second time and respond to the following questions:

- why is poet comparing his grandmother to an angel in the title of the poem?
- what is the grandmother say in the second stanza?
- what senses appear in this poem? where?
- what happened to the grandmother?
- What is your interpretation of the last two stanzas of the poem?

At his moment I want for you to write a poem making references to the five senses

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### Step 3—Your Assignment: Write a Poem about Your Favorite Family Member or Relative

Use **your five senses**. Choose a favorite family member to write about. Make some notes about what is special about them to you. Include something about each of the five senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch).

Ask yourself—when I think of this person:

- what do I see?
- what do I hear?
- what do I feel by touching?
- what do I taste?
- what do I smell?

Then, write a poem about this person that includes something for each of the five senses. You decide on the number of lines and on the specific form of the stanzas in your poem. Instead of writing something like this:

*I like how my grandmother looks.*

*I like how my grandmother sounds.*

*I like how my grandmother's hands feel.*

This is okay, but you can make your poems much more interesting by comparing one of the sounds or sights or feelings to something else.

For example:

*My grandma's hands are soft as silk when they caress me.*

Use **comparisons in your poem**. While writing your poem take another look at the things you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste. Then try to find more interesting ways to describe those things.

Which of these two descriptions below do you think my sister Betty, the dentist, would find more original, and thus, more powerful?

*Your teeth are pretty or Your teeth are pearls*

By comparing **teeth** to **pearls**, I am saying that my sister's teeth are not only pretty but also that they have the same qualities of pearls which are precious jewels.

Thus, for example, if you wrote,

*I like the sound of my father's voice,*

you might want to change it to:

*My father's voice is like the roaring of a lion.*