

# I Cannot Remember My Mother



## Reflect and Respond

- I Work in pairs. Discuss the memories from your childhood that you remember. List them and share with your classmates and teacher.
- II Discuss how children's relationship with their mother can influence their emotions and memories.
- III Match the words given in Column 1 with their meanings in Column 2.

Column 1	Column 2
1. hover	(i) sing a tune with your lips closed
2. hum	(ii) a type of flower (coral jasmine)
3. cradle	(iii) look steadily for a long time
4. <i>shiuli</i>	(iv) rituals conducted in a temple
5. morning service	(v) linger or remain near a place
6. gaze	(vi) a small bed for a baby





## Reading for Appreciation

I cannot remember my mother  
only sometimes in the midst of my play  
a tune seems to hover over my playthings,  
the tune of some song that she used to  
hum while rocking my cradle.



I cannot remember my mother  
but when in the early autumn morning  
the smell of the *shiuli* flowers floats in the air  
the scent of the morning service in the temple  
comes to me as the scent of my mother.

I cannot remember my mother  
only when from my bedroom window I send  
my eyes into the blue of the distant sky,  
I feel that the stillness of  
my mother's gaze on my face  
has spread all over the sky.



RABINDRANATH TAGORE



## Check Your Understanding

I Fill in the blanks with appropriate words.

Stanza 1

1. The poet remembers his mother while he \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The poet remembers the \_\_\_\_\_ but not the \_\_\_\_\_.

Setting: \_\_\_\_\_ (outdoor/indoor)

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Stanza 2

1. The poet remembers his mother in the \_\_\_\_\_ season.
2. The poet remembers his mother by the smell of \_\_\_\_\_.

Setting: \_\_\_\_\_ (outdoor/indoor)

Stanza 3

1. The poet feels that his mother \_\_\_\_\_ at him from the \_\_\_\_\_.

Setting: \_\_\_\_\_ (outdoor/indoor)

II The senses of olfactory (smell), auditory (hearing), and visual (sight), are three of the five basic senses in humans. Give examples of references to senses from the poem. Complete the table given below.

Stanza	Lines from the Poem	Senses
1.	_____ _____ _____	
3.	...the tune of some song that she used to hum while rocking my cradle	
2.	_____ _____ _____ _____	olfactory

III Read the poem silently once again and complete the following.

1. Two examples of alliteration from the poem are (i) \_\_\_\_\_ and (ii) \_\_\_\_\_.
2. An example of onomatopoeia is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The poem uses imagery extensively. Explain.



4. Although the poem does not have a rhyme scheme, it is enjoyable because \_\_\_\_\_.
5. What is the tone of the poet? Why do you say so?
6. What impact does the title of the poem have on the overall mood of the poem?
7. The poet uses 'I cannot remember my mother' as a refrain because \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The poet uses symbolism to indicate the memory of his mother's presence. Identify the symbols used in the poem.

**Symbolism** is a literary device in which a writer uses a tangible object, abstract idea, or phenomenon that represents something beyond the literal meaning. It helps the poet convey deeper meanings and to connect with readers on an emotional level.

**Refrain** is a poetic device defined as a line or a group of lines that is repeated at regular intervals in a poem.



### Critical Reflection

I Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow.

1. *I cannot remember my mother  
only sometimes in the midst of my play  
a tune seems to hover over my playthings,*
  - (i) Complete the following sentence appropriately.  
The poet is reminded of his mother during his \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (ii) What is the primary emotion conveyed by the line 'a tune seems to hover over my playthings'?  
A. It enhances the joy of play.

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- B. It disrupts the playtime atmosphere.
  - C. It activates memories of the mother.
  - D. It symbolises the carefree nature of childhood.
- (iii) In the context of the poem, what role does the hovering tune play during the speaker's playtime?
- (iv) State whether the following sentence is true or false.
- The poet experiences the tune lingering over playthings only occasionally during playtime.
- (v) How could the poet feel his mother's presence, even though she isn't there?

2. *I feel that the stillness of  
my mother's gaze on my face  
has spread all over the sky.*

- (i) What does the poet suggest about the stillness of his mother's gaze spreading over the sky?
- A. The mother's gaze is physically present in the sky.
  - B. The sky is a symbolic extension of the mother's presence.
  - C. The sky mirrors the mother's emotions.
  - D. The stillness is fleeting and unrelated to the mother.
- (ii) What emotion does the poet associate with the 'stillness' of his mother's gaze?
- A. a sense of grief
  - B. a sense of anticipation
  - C. a sense of nostalgia
  - D. a sense of serenity
- (iii) State whether the following sentence is true or false.



The poet suggests that the mother's gaze has a tangible and visual effect on the sky.

- (iv) What is the purpose of likening the mother's gaze to the sky?
- (v) Complete the sentence appropriately.

The tone of the poet in the given extract is \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

II Answer the following questions.

1. What is the emotional impact of the refrain, 'I cannot remember my mother'?
2. Interpret the connection between the poet's mother and the following:  
(i) *shiuli* flowers (ii) humming tune
3. What role does nature play in the poet's description of the memory of his mother?
4. What can be inferred about the poet's perception of the mother-child relationship?



### Vocabulary in Context

I Work in pairs to classify the sensory words given in the box below. One example has been done for you.

rustle      sticky      glowing      hiss  
rough      chilled      aroma      gigantic  
stale      sizzle      minuscule      scent  
gloomy      deafening      vibrant      pungent  
squeaky      stinky      crimson      fluffy  
fragrant      smooth      slimy      ear-splitting  
hairy

Visual	Auditory	Olfactory	Tactile
glowing	hiss	aroma	sticky

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II Fill in the blanks with sensory words in the box for the following passage written by Sarojini Naidu. There are two extra words.

scarlet      shrill      sizzle      perfumes  
flaming      scents      sweetness      essence  
smooth

Come and share my exquisite March morning with me: this sumptuous blaze of gold and sapphire sky; these 1. \_\_\_\_\_ lilies that adorn the sunshine; the voluptuous 2. \_\_\_\_\_ of neem and *champak* and *serisha* that beat upon the languid air with their implacable 3. \_\_\_\_\_; the thousand little gold and blue and silver breasted birds bursting with the 4. \_\_\_\_\_ ecstasy of life in nesting time. And, do you know that the scarlet lilies are woven petal by petal from my heart's blood, these little quivering birds are my soul made incarnate music, these heavy 5. \_\_\_\_\_ are my emotions dissolved into aerial 6. \_\_\_\_\_, this 7. \_\_\_\_\_ blue and gold sky is the 'very me'...

III Write numbers against each picture with the phrases that describe them with their sensorial associations. One example has been done for you.

1. beats of music echo in air
2. melody of soothing scent, dancing in the air
3. fragrant breeze of blooming buds
4. gentle lullaby, a soft melody
5. colourful sky, painting a lively sight
6. attractive canvas painting the horizon





1.



### Listen and Respond

I You will listen to four short extracts of people expressing their childhood memories. As you listen, match each statement 1–6 to each speaker (i)–(iv). There are two statements that you do not need. (Transcript for teacher on page 266)

Statement	Speaker
1. The precious memories by the seaside are not the same anymore.	
2. My grandfather's encouragement influences me in moments of difficulty.	
3. The school days are a source of recollection to stay in touch.	

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4. Childhood days are about freedom and ordinary pleasures in outdoor activities.	
5. Memories of school days are grandparents and my funny tales.	
6. Parents urge us to be adventurous and discover nature but with limitations.	



## Speaking Activity

I Work in pairs. Think of an object, song, or a place that is memorable for you. Take turns to speak about it using the prompts given below.

- ✿ Introduce it briefly
- ✿ Describe it in detail including sensory details
- ✿ Narrate the specific memory associated with it
- ✿ Explain how it has impacted your life
- ✿ Summarise why this memory is meaningful to you even now

You may use the following phrases.

- ✿ During my childhood...
- ✿ Growing up, I fondly remember...
- ✿ Recalling those early years, I can't forget...
- ✿ In my younger days, I used to...
- ✿ I have a clear memory of...
- ✿ A routine activity in my childhood involved...
- ✿ A cherished part of my childhood includes...
- ✿ As a child, I was fond of...
- ✿ One of my favourite childhood moments is...
- ✿ Thinking about my early years, I recall...
- ✿ A common occurrence during my youth was...





## Writing Task

I Imagine you had been on a school trip to a scenic place which appealed to all your senses. Write a diary entry describing the place and why it was a memorable experience.

### Contents of the diary entry:

- begin with day, date, and time
- use only first person (I, my)
- capture sensory details
- express emotions
- focus on significant moments and experiences
- conclude with reflection



**Note:** Anne Frank and Zlata Filipovic considered their diaries as their friends and therefore began their diary entries with ‘Dear diary’. However, Samuel Pepys considered his diary to be a documentation of facts, his thoughts and feelings. So, he did not begin his diary entries with ‘Dear diary’.



## Learning Beyond the Text

I You read about the *shiuli* flowers from the poem. Gather more information on unique flowers of India—where they are found, how they look, what smell they emit, and what the historical significance is, if any. [For example, *Kurinji* or *Neelakurinji* that blooms once in twelve years.] Add more flowers to this list.

### *Shiuli* Flowers:

- known as *Parijat*, *Parijata*, and *Harsingar*
- revered and used for various ceremonial purposes
- release a sweet fragrance
- associated with numerous Indian legends
- bloom exclusively during the night

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- II You must have read poems and songs related to the theme of family, friends and their reminiscences, in English and also in your own language. Collect these poems and songs, and share with your classmates and teacher. Now, read and enjoy the poem given below.

## I Remember, I Remember

I remember, I remember  
The house where I was born,  
The little window where the sun  
Came peeping in at morn;  
He never came a wink too soon  
Nor brought too long a day;  
But now, I often wish the night  
Had borne my breath away.

I remember, I remember  
The roses red and white,  
The violets and the lily cups —  
Those flowers made of light!  
The lilacs where the robin built,  
And where my brother set  
The laburnum on his birthday, —  
The tree is living yet!

THOMAS HOOD

