

Remember This Planet  
by Sophie Daws

**Education Level:** 3rd - 8th grade

**Genre:** Poetry

**Time frame:** 45-60 minutes

**Objective:** To celebrate the Earth as it is now, and to grieve what parts of it we will lose in the future.

**Prior knowledge and skills:** None

**Required materials:** Paper, pen or pencil

**Literary model:** “Remember” by Joy Harjo

Living in the Anthropocene, it isn’t uncommon to hear the words “dying” and “planet” in the same sentence. I don’t think anyone is surprised by this somber outlook. What I find surreal, however, about grieving a dying planet now is that we are grieving plants, animals, and biomes that are not yet gone. I, and I believe many others, are anxiously navigating *future* grief. What will my grieving self, ten or twenty years from now, wish I had celebrated about the Earth in 2023? Will I have wished I spent more time outside? Planted a garden? Will I wish I had mourned or celebrated?

In a Joy Harjo anthology a friend recently gifted me, I came across her poem [“Remember”](#). The poem asks us to remember our origins (the wind, the sun, the Earth at large). Could the art of remembrance be an effective way to navigate present and future grief?

When I’ve lost someone close to me, I’ve missed all the little things: the way they stood at the stove when they cooked, or the way they rubbed their temples when reading a book. Some of these mannerisms go unnoticed when they are alive but come rushing to the fore and are the things we ache for most when they’re gone.

In a session with Susan Weckwerth’s fourth grade class at Manzo Elementary, a student excitedly called out “Mountain Dew bottle!” when I asked what we find in the Sonoran Desert. I thought her answer intriguing, as well as observant. I thought a frank conversation about where the planet is headed might go over well with these honest young people. Could we celebrate the planet for succulent prickly pear cactus and fluorescent Mountain Dew bottle alike? Could we celebrate the planet as it *actually* is now, so that we might remember it more clearly in the future?

*Sequence of Activities*

Literary Model      5 - 10 minutes

Read [Joy Harjo's poem aloud once](#). Then play a recording of Joy reading the poem.

I asked the students to *close* their eyes, their mouths, their hands, and *open* their ears. I asked them after hearing Joy Harjo read "Remember" what they imagined in the "movie screen behind their eyelids." Hint: I told them in between me reading the poem and Joy reading the poem, that the movie screen won't work if their eyes or mouths are open (in other words, if they're talking and looking around).

Allow for some imagery to fill the space. (Note: the imagery they share in their mind's eye doesn't have to be imagery found in Joy Harjo's poem.)

Discussion      10 minutes

Ask the students the following:

- What changes does the Earth go through regularly now? (Think of the seasons, etc)
- What do we like about the Sonoran Desert now?
- How might the Sonoran Desert change in ten years? Twenty? Fifty?

Note: I allowed the discussion to move towards phenomena like extinction, habitat destruction, grief, and loss.

Sonoran Desert Creative Ancestor, or "Creative Ancestor" for short      10 minutes

Earlier in this residency I asked students to pick a "Sonoran Desert creative ancestor" that most spoke to them. We started the residency by naming creatures in the Sonoran Desert. We made a huge list and then I asked students to pick a creature that they felt they could be friends with (another way of asking which one is their favorite). I asked the students about their creative ancestor via the brainstorm questions below.

- How does your creative ancestor make you feel?
- If this creature could talk, what would they say?
- What would they say they do in the Sonoran Desert now?
- How do they feel about the Sonoran Desert?

Prompt      20 minutes

Tell the students to return to their desks or have them write on clipboards. I conducted this lesson plan outside. Ask students to write a list poem of all the things they want themselves to remember fifty years from now about either themselves and/or their "Sonoran creative ancestor".

Share

*10 minutes*