

Essay Assignment
ENWR 106: College Writing II
Instructor: Jessica Restaino

Paper Assignment: Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz"

Below you will find options for writing about Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz" that build on your reading comments and our class discussion. Select one option that most appeals to you as a reader and writer. If you would like to pursue Option #4, please email me your idea in advance of our next class meeting. Your paper should be 4-5 pages long, typed and double-spaced. Be sure to work closely with the text (quote the poem!) to support your position and deepen your discussion. Please use MLA citation format.

Draft due: XXX (please bring two copies for peer review)

Revision 1 due: XXX

Options

- 1) The issue of "violence" came up in our class discussion quite a lot. Consider the language and images in the poem that invite us to explore this topic. Construct an argument about the extent to which Roethke's poem portrays physical or psychological violence in the dynamics between father and son. What potential insights does Roethke's poem offer regarding the relationship between a parent and child, or between a father and son, more specifically? To what extent is the notion of violence complicated by competing tensions or desires between the father and son? What are these tensions and how do they compare—or in what ways are they relatable to—the poem's language and imagery? Is it possible this poem isn't about violence at all—why or why not?
- 2) One of our reading comments points out that the father "beat time" on the boy's head. Think about the issue of timing, dance, and music, obviously so central to the poem's title and content. Construct an argument that explores the significance of the "waltz" to this poem and to the central relationship it portrays. Does Roethke use the "waltz" to complicate our understanding of this relationship between father and son? If so, how?
- 3) In some of our discussion, we explored the boy's love for his father. Paying careful attention to language and imagery in the poem, construct an argument that examines the boy's affection for his dad. In what ways is this love complicated or challenged by the interaction portrayed in the poem? Or, conversely, to what extent is the scene Roethke paints here indicative of an uncomplicated and mutual affection?
- 4) Design your own: Perhaps our reading comments and ensuing discussion didn't hit on some aspect of the poem that you noticed, or perhaps, after our discussion, you thought up an alternate reading or question that has complicated your understanding of the poem. If you would like to develop an argument that does not respond to any of the choices below, please email me no later than XX/XX and we will collaborate on a prompt for your writing.