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I Cannot Remember My Mother

Summary

The poem "I Cannot Remember My Mother" by Rabindranath Tagore expresses the deep emotions of a child who has lost his mother at a very young age. The poet says that he cannot clearly remember his mother's face or presence. However, certain moments in nature and everyday life remind him of her love and care.

While playing, he sometimes hears a soft tune that reminds him of the lullaby his mother used to sing while rocking him. In the early autumn morning, the fragrance of shiuli flowers brings back the feeling of his mother's presence, just like the peaceful atmosphere of a temple. Similarly, when he looks at the vast blue sky from his window, he feels the calm and loving gaze of his mother spread all around him.

Even though the poet cannot remember his mother directly, her love lives on in nature, memories, and emotions.

- **Message:** A mother's love lives forever in our memories and in the beauty of nature.

New Terms

- **Hover** – to stay or float in the air gently
- **Tune** – a melody or a musical sound
- **Hum** – to sing softly without opening the mouth
- **Cradle** – a small bed for a baby that can be gently rocked
- **Midst** – the middle of something
- **Autumn** – the season between summer and winter (fall)
- **Shiuli flowers** – small, fragrant white flowers that bloom in early autumn
- **Scent** – a pleasant smell or fragrance
- **Temple service** – prayers or rituals performed in a temple
- **Floats** – moves gently through air or water
- **Distant** – far away
- **Stillness** – calmness and quietness
- **Gaze** – a steady look

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.

Ans. Some childhood memories I remember are

- Playing games with friends in the evening
- Listening to bedtime stories from parents or grandparents
- Celebrating festivals like Diwali or birthdays
- Going to school for the first time
- Watching cartoons or favorite TV shows
- Family trips or picnics
- Learning to ride a bicycle
- Helping parents in small tasks

II. Discuss how children's relationship with their mother can influence their emotions and memories.

Ans. A child's relationship with their mother deeply influences their emotions and memories. A mother provides love, care, and comfort, which makes the child feel safe and happy. These feelings stay in the child's heart and shape their memories. Even when the mother is not present, her love is remembered through small experiences and emotions.

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

Ans.

Column 1	Column 2
1. Hover	(v) linger or remain near a place
2. Hum	(i) sing a tune with your lips closed
3. Cradle	(vi) a small bed for a baby
4. Shiuli	(ii) a type of flower (coral jasmine)
5. Morning service	(iv) rituals conducted in a temple
6. Gaze	(iii) look steadily for a long time

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)
- 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)

Ans.

- Stanza 1
 1. The poet remembers his mother while he is playing.
 2. The poet remembers the tune but not the words.
 Setting: Indoor
- Stanza 2
 1. The poet remembers his mother in the early autumn season.
 2. The poet remembers his mother by the smell of shiuli flowers.
 Setting: Outdoor
- Stanza 3
 1. The poet feels that his mother is gazing at him from the sky.
 Setting: Indoor (looking outside)

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

Ans.

Stanza	Lines from the Poem	Senses
1	<i>"...a tune seems to hover over my playthings..."</i> <i>"...the tune of some song that she used to hum while rocking my cradle"</i>	Auditory (hearing)
2	<i>"...the smell of the shiuli flowers floats in the air..."</i> <i>"...the scent of the morning service in the temple..."</i>	Olfactory (smell)
3	<i>"...I send my eyes into the blue of the distant sky..."</i> <i>"...the stillness of my mother's gaze..."</i>	Visual (sight)

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

1. Two examples of alliteration from the poem are (i) _____ and (ii) _____.

Ans. (i) "my mother" (ii) "blue of the distant sky"

2. An example of onomatopoeia is _____.

Ans. hum

3. The poem uses imagery extensively. Explain.

Ans. The poem uses vivid imagery to appeal to our senses of sound, smell, and sight. The soft tune of the mother's lullaby creates sound imagery, the fragrance of shiuli flowers creates smell imagery, and the vast blue sky creates visual imagery. These images help the reader feel the poet's memories and emotions clearly.

4. Although the poem does not have a rhyme scheme, it is enjoyable because _____.

Ans. Although the poem does not have a rhyme scheme, it is enjoyable because it is rich in beautiful imagery, emotions, and repetition that create a musical and heartfelt effect.

5. What is the tone of the poet? Why do you say so?

Ans. The tone of the poet is melancholic and nostalgic because he expresses sadness and longing for his mother whom he cannot remember clearly, yet feels her presence through memories and nature.

6. What impact does the title of the poem have on the overall mood of the poem?

Ans. The title "I Cannot Remember My Mother" creates a sad, emotional, and nostalgic mood. It prepares the reader for a poem filled with longing, memories, and the deep feeling of loss and love for the mother.

7. The poet uses 'I cannot remember my mother' as a refrain because _____.

Ans. The poet uses 'I cannot remember my mother' as a refrain because it highlights his inability to clearly recall his mother and emphasizes his deep sense of longing and emotional connection with her.

8. The poet uses symbolism to indicate the memory of his mother's presence. Identify the symbols used in the poem.

Ans. The symbols used in the poem are:

- **The hovering tune** – shows the mother's loving presence that cannot be seen but is still felt everywhere like care and comfort.
- **The cradle** – represents the earliest bond between mother and child, full of love, safety, and complete dependence.
- **The shiuli flowers and temple scent** – represent memories of the mother linked with purity, devotion, and daily life. The flowers also show that life and beauty are temporary, like moments with the mother.
- **The blue distant sky** – symbolises endless love, peace, and the feeling that the mother's presence is everywhere.
- **The stillness of the gaze** – reflects the mother's calm, gentle, and eternal love that remains in the child's heart forever.

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 _____.

Ans. playtime

(ii) What is the primary emotion conveyed by the line 'a tune seems to hover over my playthings'?

- It enhances the joy of play.
- It disrupts the playtime atmosphere.
- It activates memories of the mother.
- It symbolises the carefree nature of childhood.

Ans. C. It activates memories of the mother.

(iii) In the context of the poem, what role does the hovering tune play during the speaker's playtime?

Ans. In the context of the poem, the hovering tune plays the role of a gentle reminder of the poet's mother during his playtime. It brings back memories of the lullaby she used to hum, making him feel her loving presence even though he cannot clearly remember her.

(iv) State whether the following sentence is true or false.

- The poet experiences the tune lingering over playthings only occasionally during playtime.

Ans. True

(v) How could the poet feel his mother's presence, even though she isn't there?

Ans. The poet feels his mother's presence through the tune of the song she used to hum, which comes back to him during play.

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?

- The mother's gaze is physically present in the sky.
- The sky is a symbolic extension of the mother's presence.
- The sky mirrors the mother's emotions.
- The stillness is fleeting and unrelated to the mother.

Ans. B. The sky is a symbolic extension of the mother's presence.

(ii) What emotion does the poet associate with the 'stillness' of his mother's gaze?

- a sense of grief
- a sense of anticipation
- a sense of nostalgia
- a sense of serenity

Ans. 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.

Ans. False

(iv) What is the purpose of likening the mother's gaze to the sky?

Ans. The purpose of likening the mother's gaze to the sky is to show that her love is vast, calm, and ever-present. Just like the sky surrounds everything, the poet feels that his mother's gentle and protective gaze is always around him, giving him comfort and peace even in her absence.

(v) Complete the sentence appropriately.

- The tone of the poet in the given extract is _____ because _____.

Vocabulary in Context

Ans. The tone of the poet in the given extract is calm and emotional because he feels his mother's

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

peaceful presence in nature.

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

II. Answer the following questions.

scarlet	shrill	sizzle	perfumes
flaming	scents	sweetness	essence
smooth			

1. What is the emotional impact of the refrain, 'I cannot remember my mother'?

Ans. The refrain creates a deep emotional impact by expressing the poet's loss, while also showing that his mother's presence still lives in his memories and feelings.

2. Interpret the connection between the poet's mother and the following:

- (i) Shiuli flowers (ii) Humming tune

Ans.

- (i) **Shiuli flowers** – They represent the fragrance and gentle memory of the mother.
- (ii) **Humming tune** – It represents the mother's lullaby, love, and care.

3. What role does nature play in the poet's description of the memory of his mother?

Ans. Nature plays a very important role in the poem as it helps the poet remember his mother. Elements of nature like the shiuli flowers, their fragrance, and the vast blue sky act as symbols of his mother's presence. Through these natural experiences, the poet feels her love, calmness, and care, even though she is not physically present.

4. What can be inferred about the poet's perception of the mother-child relationship?

Ans. It can be inferred that the poet sees the mother-child relationship as deep, emotional, and everlasting. Even though he cannot clearly remember his mother, her love continues to live within him through memories, feelings, and nature. This shows that a mother's love is unconditional and never fades, remaining a constant source of comfort and connection in the child's life.

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

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

- 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



□



□



□



□



1.



□

blood, these little quivering birds are my soul made incarnate music, these heavy 5. _____ are



3



4



5



6



1.



2

Listen and Respond

my emotions dissolved into aerial 6. _____, this 7. _____ blue and gold sky is the 'very me'...

Ans. Fill in the Blanks:

1. scarlet lilies 2. voluptuous scents 3. implacable sweetness 4. shrill ecstasy

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.	
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.	

5. heavy perfumes 6. aerial essence 7. flaming blue and gold sky

Statement	Speaker
1. The precious memories by the seaside are not the same anymore.	(iii)
2. My grandfather's encouragement influences me in moments of difficulty.	(i)
3. The school days are a source of recollection to stay in touch.	(iv)
4. Childhood days are about freedom and ordinary pleasures in outdoor activities.	(ii)
5. Memories of school days are grandparents and my funny tales.	— (Not needed)
6. Parents urge us to be adventurous and discover nature but with limitations.	— (Not needed)

Speaking Activity

- Come and share my exquisite March morning with me: this sumptuous blaze of gold and sapphire sky; these scarlet lilies that adorn the sunshine; the voluptuous of neem and champak and serisha that beat upon the languid air with their implacable; the thousand little gold and blue and silver breasted birds bursting with the shrill 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 perfumes are my emotions dissolved into aerial essence, this flaming 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.

- beats of music echo in air
- melody of soothing scent, dancing in the air
- fragrant breeze of blooming buds
- gentle lullaby, a soft melody
- colourful sky, painting a lively sight
- attractive canvas painting the horizon

Ans.

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)

Ans.

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...

Writing Task

- 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...

Ans. Sample Response:

During my childhood, I fondly remember a beautiful place near my home—a small park filled with trees and flowers.

Growing up, I used to visit this park every evening with my friends. The park was full of colourful flowers, and I could smell their sweet fragrance. I could hear birds chirping and children laughing, which made the place lively and joyful. The cool breeze touching my face felt very refreshing.

I have a clear memory of playing on the swings and running around freely with my friends. Those moments were full of happiness and excitement.

This place has impacted my life by giving me joyful memories and teaching me the importance of spending time in nature and with friends.

In summary, this memory is still meaningful to me because it reminds me of my carefree childhood and fills my heart with happiness even today.

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

Ans.

Monday, 12 October 2025

8:30 p.m.

Today was one of the most memorable days of my life. I went on a school trip to a beautiful hill station, and the experience was simply unforgettable.

As soon as I reached, I was amazed by the breathtaking view of the green mountains and the clear blue sky. The cool breeze gently touched my face, making me feel fresh and relaxed. I could hear birds chirping melodiously and leaves rustling softly in the wind. The sweet fragrance of flowers filled the air, making the surroundings even more pleasant.

One of the most exciting moments was when we visited a waterfall. The sound of water flowing down the rocks was soothing, and the mist felt cool on my skin. I also enjoyed spending time with my friends, laughing, clicking pictures, and exploring nature together.

This trip made me feel happy, peaceful, and connected to nature. It taught me the importance of taking a break from routine life and enjoying the beauty around us.

As I think about this day, I feel grateful for such a wonderful experience. This memory will always remain close to my heart.

— End of Entry —

