



X. J. Kennedy

“Read poems. Lots of poems. All kinds of poems . . . You’ll find it becomes easier to write poems yourself.”

Getting to Know X. J. Kennedy

X. J. Kennedy was born in Dover, New Jersey, in 1929. His name is really Joseph, but he decided to write under the name X. J. Kennedy so people wouldn’t think he was the better-known Joe Kennedy of Massachusetts.

X. J. Kennedy’s poems for children have been published in magazines such as *Cricket* and *Highlights for Children* and in anthologies. Mr. Kennedy writes for adults and children and has won many awards and honors for his writing. He has published at least eighteen books for youngsters.

X. J. Kennedy and his wife, Dorothy, live in Lexington, Massachusetts. Mr. Kennedy’s wife is also a writer, and they have created several books together. They have five grown children and six grandchildren.

Poet to Poet: Tips for Young Writers

Finding Ideas for Writing

X. J. Kennedy says,

“Poems start out in different ways. Some begin when I notice something, or experience something, or think of something, or read about something that . . . sets off strong feelings. These things may be anything from a newspaper article about fireflies to the experience of blowing the fuzz from a dandelion. A poem is what happens when I’m trying to fix those things into keepable shape. But about half the time, a poem will start without any idea at all, without any special feelings. I think of a line, and it has some rhythm to it, and sounds worth keeping. Then I think up another line to rhyme with it, and the lines keep on accumulating.”

Choosing the Right Tools for Writing

What are X. J. Kennedy’s favorite tools for writing? He says,

“I like to write on my computer, because it’s so easy to change stuff. If there isn’t any computer handy, then I’ll write with pen, pencil, anything, on any kind of paper that comes to hand and transfer it to my computer later.”

So, poets, it sounds as if X. J. Kennedy makes many revisions since he likes the computer for changing things easily. And we know that rewriting and revisions make our writing stronger.

Advice for Young Poets

This is X. J. Kennedy's advice for young poets:

“Try to remember the poems you read or hear. The ones you love, that is, the few that really talk to you. You can forget about the rest. But those favorite poems you discover, fix them in your head. Try saying them back again, out loud or to yourself. Make them part of you. You'll find it becomes easier to write poems yourself, maybe poems that, if you're lucky, might become favorites of other people.”

We already have some favorite poems in our class. Can you think of one we have tucked away in our hearts and in our memories? Let's try to say one of our favorites aloud right now. I think X. J. Kennedy is right, that when you have poems tucked away in your heart and mind, you will write better poems too.

Poems in *Climb Inside a Poem*

“Laundromat”

Read More by X. J. Kennedy

Exploding Gravy: Poems to Make You Laugh

Little, Brown, 2002

Elympics: Poems

Philomel, 1999

The Beasts of Bethlehem

Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1992

Talking Like the Rain: A Read-to-Me Book of Poems

Little, Brown, 1992

The Kite That Braved Old Orchard Beach: Year-Round Poems for Young People

Margaret K. McElderry, 1991

Brats

Margaret K. McElderry, 1986

The Forgetful Wishing Well: Poems for Young People

Atheneum, 1985

Knock at a Star: A Child's Introduction to Poetry

Little, Brown revised edition, 1999