

On dillard's an american childhood

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



Dillard's essay *An American Childhood* relives a moment in the author's past which she could not forget as the particular event stirs a certain kind of awareness within her; something that she still carries and that continues to affect her even as an adult. It is the idea of carrying through a challenge or task that she is facing at the moment with fervor and conviction, of forgetting everything for the sake of the goal however little or even stupid it might seem to others.

This theme is put into words when the author describes how during the chase he realizes "...an immense discovery, pounding into my hot head with every sliding, joyous step, that this ordinary adult evidently knew what I thought only children who trained at football know: that you have to fling yourself at what you're doing. You have to point yourself, forget yourself, aim, dive (par. 12)."

In narrating his experience, Dillard uses several techniques, the most obvious of which is when she compares a general event from his childhood (that of playing ball) to a specific one (an incident which happened one winter when he was seven years old). The general event is supposed to provide the point of reflection to the specific event so that the reader would understand the extent to which the specific event affected her later in life.

The lessons, the author says, which she learned from being chased relentlessly by an adult is very much like the lessons she learned from playing ball: giving one's all without regard for everything else including the question as to whether the pursuit is worth it or not. The exhilaration of living the moment and pouring all of one's energy like that moment is already the

essence of existence. Facing defeat doesn't even matter. She thinks that grown-ups do not understand this idea therefore she is surprised when the man makes her see that even grown-ups could think and act like they children, too.

Although making the connection between the two separate scenes creates a profound effect upon the reading of the essay, Dillard's engaging writing style is the most effective technique which makes the piece interesting to read. There are only two scenes (on playing ball as a kid and the chase between the kids and the adult after the former throw a snowball on the latter's windshield) but the narrative is very detailed from the names of the author's childhood friends to the color and model of the car which they hit with a snowball.

The emotions of every moment are well-described. The short sentences approximate the breathless quality of the chase. Even the quality of a child's imagination is captured by the author as she muses on the possibility of keeping up the run until Panama. The introductory paragraph is a description about how to play ball, the strategies of playing it best, and the need to give one's all in every task be it in throwing the ball or guarding the bases.

It is simply descriptive and does not give a clue that the preceding paragraphs would be a narrative of the author's experience. This might not hook the reader who prefers narrative texts rather than philosophical musings. However, the subject of the paragraph, which is about playing a sport, would attract the general reader who, more usually than not, would be a football or baseball enthusiast and thus would understand the idea of giving one's all in the heat of a game.

The final paragraph simply recaps the preceding paragraphs. The chase has ended, they have been caught by the adult and lectured upon, and therefore, the story being told has already ended. The preceding paragraphs already finished the story. The final paragraph where the author is musing about the experience, simply wraps up everything. The effect, however, instead of being a redundant ending provides a sense of closure upon the reader and reiterates the main idea that the author would like the reader to grasp.