Sensory Imagery

1.) Discovering sensory imagery through strong writers.

Read the following passages and UNDERLINE words that bring strong images to your mind:

“Then there was the bad weather. It would come in one day when the fall was over. We would have to shut the windows in the night against the rain and the cold wind would strip the leaves from the trees in the Place Contrescarpe. The leaves lay sodden in the rain and the wind drove the rain against the big green autobus at the terminal and the Café des Amateurs was crowded and the windows misted over from the heat and the smoke inside. It was a sad, evilly run café where the drunckards of the quarter crowded together and I kept away from it because of the smell of dirty bodies and the sour smell of drunkenness.”

-From Ernest Hemingway’s memoir A Moveable Feast, in which he describes his life in Paris during the 1920s

“Maniac had seen some amazing things in his lifetime, but nothing as amazing as that house. From the smell of it, he knew this wasn’t the first time an animal had relieved itself on the rugless floor. In fact, in another corner he spotted a form of relief that could not be soaked up by newspapers...Cans and bottles lay all over, along with crusts, peelings, cores, scraps, rind, wrappers—everything you would normally find in a garbage can. And everywhere there were raisins...He ran a hand along one wall. The peeling paint came off like cornflakes.

Nothing could be worse than the living and dining rooms, yet the kitchen was. A jar of peanut butter had crashed to the floor; someone had gotten a running start, jumped into it, and skied a brown, one-footed track to the stove. On the table were what appeared to be the remains of an autopsy performed upon a large bird, possibly a crow: The refrigerator contained two food groups: mustard and beer. The raisins were even more abundant. He spotted several of them moving. They weren’t raisins, they were roaches.”

-From Jerry Spinelli’s Maniac Magee
“She drew her shoulders up and sucked in her breath with the pure pleasure of being alive, and just at that moment she happened to glance at a face just a few feet from hers. It was a boy with shaggy black hair, in a convertible jalopy painted gold…She spent three hours with him, at the restaurant where they ate hamburgers and drank Cokes in wax cups that were always sweating, and then down an alley a mile or so away, and when he left her off at five to eleven only the movie house was still open at the plaza.”

-From Joyce Carol Oates’ Where are You Going, Where Have You Been?

*As you read the previous passages, you should have noticed the way the authors use sensory imagery in their writing. Sensory imagery is when an author uses descriptive language that appeals to one of the five senses to create a strong image in their reader’s head.

2. Bringing sensory imagery to our own writing.

Now, think about the story you’ve decided to tell for your memoir. Close your eyes and imagine the scene(s). Now answer the following in your journal. Label Journal 4:

• What do you see?
• What do you hear?
• What do you smell?
• What do you taste?

3. How do you feel?

This can be tricky. Try and describe your feelings at a major point in your memoir, using more than just one word (For example don’t just say: I was scared, I was sad, I was happy). Look at this example to get an idea of how one author describes the feelings his character ‘Squeaky’ feels right before a track race:

“Every time, just before I take off in a race, I always feel like I’m in a dream, the kind of dream you have when you’re sick with fever and feel all hot and weightless…But once I spread my fingers in the dirt and crouch over the Get on Your Mark, the dream goes and I am solid again and am telling myself, Squeaky, you must win, you must win, you are the fastest thing in the world, you can even beat your father up Amsterdam if you really try. And then I feel my weight coming back just behind my knees then down to my feet then into the earth and the pistol shot explodes in my blood and I am off and weightless again...”

-Toni Cade Bambara’s Raymond’s Run

*Now think about your own memoir and list the feelings you felt at important points in the story.

....Now try and expand upon one of these feelings like Toni Bambara did in the passage above (be creative!). Try and write at least 3 sentences. For example, if you were excited at one point in your memoir try and show the reader what this excitement felt like.