

"Jeremy" is based on two different true stories. The song takes its main inspiration from a newspaper article about a 16-year-old boy named Jeremy Wade Delle, born February 10, 1975, from Richardson, Texas who shot himself in front of his English class at Richardson High School on the morning of January 8, 1991 at about 9:45 am. In a 2009 interview, Vedder said that he felt "the need to take that small article and make something of it—to give that action, to give it reaction, to give it more importance."

Delle was described by schoolmates as "real quiet" and known for "acting sad." After coming in to class late that morning, Delle was told to get an admittance slip from the school office. He left the classroom, and returned with a .357 Magnum revolver. Delle walked to the front of the classroom, announced "Miss, I got what I really went for", put the barrel of the firearm in his mouth, and pulled the trigger before his teacher or classmates could react. A girl named Lisa Moore knew Jeremy from the in-school suspension program: "He and I would pass notes back and forth and he would talk about life and stuff," she said. "He signed all of his notes, 'Write back.' But on Monday he wrote, 'Later days.' I didn't know what to make of it. But I never thought this would happen."

When asked about the song, Vedder explained:

It came from a small paragraph in a paper which means you kill yourself and you make a big old sacrifice and try to get your revenge. That all you're gonna end up with is a paragraph in a newspaper. Sixty-three degrees and cloudy in a suburban neighborhood. That's the beginning of the video and that's the same thing is that in the end, it does nothing ... nothing changes. The world goes on and you're gone. The best revenge is to live on and prove yourself. Be stronger than those people. And then you can come back.

The other story that the song is based on involved a student that Vedder knew from his junior high school in San Diego, California. He elaborated further in a 1991 interview:

I actually knew somebody in junior high school, in San Diego, California, that did the same thing, just about, didn't take his life but ended up shooting up an oceanography room. I remember being in the halls and hearing it and I had actually had altercations with this kid in the past. I was kind of a rebellious fifth-grader and I think we got in fights and stuff. So it's a bit about this kid named Jeremy and it's also a bit about a kid named Brian that I knew and I don't know...the song, I think it says a lot. I think it goes somewhere...and a lot of people interpret it different ways and it's just been recently that I've been talking about the true meaning behind it and I hope no one's offended and believe me, I think of Jeremy when I sing it.

Jeremy - Pearl Jam

At home
Drawing pictures
Of mountain tops
With him on top
Lemon yellow sun
Arms raised in a V
Dead lay in pools of maroon below
Daddy didn't give attention
To the fact that mommy didn't care
King Jeremy the wicked
Ruled his world
Jeremy spoke in class today
Jeremy spoke in class today
Clearly I remember
Pickin' on the boy
Seemed a harmless little guy
But we unleashed a lion
Gnashed his teeth
And bit the recessed lady's breast
How could i forget
He hit me with a surprise left
My jaw left hurtin
Dropped wide open
Just like the day
Like the day i heard
Daddy didn't give affection
And the boy was something mommy wouldn't wear
King jeremy the wicked
Ruled his world
Jeremy spoke in class today
Jeremy spoke in class today
Try to forget this...
Try to erase this...
From the blackboard.