

Name: _____ Date: _____

Analyzing Poetry

Below is Robert Hayden's poem "Those Winter Sundays." The notes on the side define some words that you might not know. (We left two of the definitions for you to write. Look the words up in a dictionary and work as a class to answer the questions.) After you read the poem a few times, answer the questions on the next few pages.

Those Winter Sundays



Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

A *banked fire* is a fire that has been covered with ashes so that it doesn't burn.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

How often does something that is *chronic* happen?
Over how long of a period of time does it happen?

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

If you are *indifferent* to something, how do you feel about it?

If you call something *austere*, you mean that it is plain and empty in a way that makes it seem harsh and unpleasant. If you call a person *austere*, you are saying that the person has strong self-discipline—so much that he or she is overly serious and no fun to be around.

You are probably familiar with an *office* as a place where people go to work. *Office* can also refer to a role or duty. So when Hayden writes of "love's austere and lonely offices," he might be personifying love and talking about a physical place where it goes to work—and he might also mean "love's responsibilities."

—Robert Hayden

Directions: Working as a class or in groups, answer the questions that follow. Most of these have no right or wrong answer—so just think about the question and share your ideas. Note: The poem doesn't say whether the speaker is male or female. We refer to the speaker as "he" in this activity just to make things simpler.

The Big Picture

<p>The speaker of the poem is _____ talking about _____.</p> <p>Ⓐ a child, the present Ⓑ an adult, his childhood Ⓒ an adult, the present</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Explain your answer. What tells you how old the speaker is now and what period of his life he is talking about in the poem?</p>
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First Stanza

1	Consider the word "too" in the first line. Why is it important? What does it tell you?

2	What does the speaker say about his father's hands?

3	What can you infer about the father's job? (Think about your answers to questions 1 and 2.) Explain.

4	"Cold" is a temperature, it doesn't have a color—but the speaker says that his father got dressed in the "blueblack cold." What do you think he means?

5

The speaker says that his father made "banked fires blaze." What is he talking about? Where were the fires?

6

In the last line of the first stanza, the speaker says, "No one ever thanked him."	Who is "him"?	What did he do that no one ever thanked him for?	Who might have thanked him but didn't?

Second Stanza

1

The speaker writes that he would hear the cold "splintering, breaking." What do you think he means? Is he comparing the cold to something?	What is similar about the way the speaker describes the cold in this stanza to the way he describes the cold in the first stanza?

2

The speaker refers to the "chronic angers of that house." He doesn't give any details—but what are some ideas of what he could mean? Do you think he is saying that the house itself was angry, that the people in it were angry, or both?

Third Stanza

1

In this stanza the speaker names something else his father did for him, in addition to getting up early and warming up the house. What is it?

2

In the first line of this stanza, the speaker notes that he spoke "indifferently" to his father. Which other line in the poem expresses the idea that the speaker was indifferent to his father?

3

Think about the last two lines of the poem. Whose love is the speaker talking about?

4

Why do you think the speaker says that love's offices are "austere and lonely"?

5

How do you think the speaker feels now about the way he treated his father? Explain.