



Name: _____ () Class: _____ Date: _____

Read the poem carefully and answer the questions that follow:

Those Winter Sundays, by Robert Hayden

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
banked¹ fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

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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,

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 austere² and lonely offices³?

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- (i) What are your impressions of the father?
- (ii) How does the poet effectively describe the strained relationship between the father and the son?

¹ banked: a fire covered with ashes and embers, kept low but alive

² austere: severe or strict in manner

³ offices: refers to the father's roles and responsibilities

Suggested answers

- (i) What are your impressions of the father?

P + Explanation	Evidence
<p>Unappreciated</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The father did all sorts of nice things for the son, such as waking up early on a Sunday despite being tired from working all week just to make the house warm enough before waking the son up. • However, the son never responded with a word of thanks, and even spoke indifferently, without feelings or 'care or love' to his father, taking for granted what his father has done. • The sense of regret expressed by the son also highlight that the father is extremely unappreciated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'No one ever thanked him.' • 'Speaking indifferently to him' • 'What did I know, what did I know'
<p>Hard worker/ Resilient</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite the cold, and it being a rest day, he makes an effort to warm the house. • He seems to have a demanding job which requires a lot of physical labour and effort from him • He also seems to have too much work on his hands, as 'lonely offices' suggest that he may put in more time than others and may have worked overtime on his own after work hours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'with cracked hands that ached / from labor in the weekday weather' • 'lonely offices'
<p>Hot-tempered/Impatient</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The son seems to fear his father, as evident n (...) • Son being fearful 'that house' symbolises his fear towards his father: who most likely may have projected his anger on his son ('chronic angers') through fierce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'fearing the chronic angers of that house'

scoldings. These bouts of anger happened often ('chronic' = persisting long time / constantly recurring) thus highlighting how short-fused and hot-tempered the father may have been.	
<p>Authoritative/Stern/Cold</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The son's decision to keep his distance from his father may suggest that the father is so stern and cold that the son finds him unapproachable and fear him. The son's deliberate slow movement in preparing for breakfast reveals his defiance/reluctance to meet his father, for fear of angering him or being scolded by him. The son's address of 'Father' instead of 'Dad' or 'Papa' suggests that there is also an emotional distance between the two, which also emphasises how father may have adopted a strict disposition in front of his son. <p>*Abusive is not accepted as the speaker is speaking on a tone of regret in the last two lines. It suggests that the son realises his father's past scoldings and shows of anger may have been for his own good, perhaps a way of disciplining him to make him a better person.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'No one ever thanked him' 'Slowly I would rise and dress' 'my father' 'love's austere'

- (ii) How does the poet effectively describe the strained relationship between the father and the son?

P + Explanation	Evidence
<p>Repetition</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repetition of the phrase 'what did I know' emphasises the extent of the son's regret at not knowing better how much his father loved him, almost giving a sense of the son sighing in despair about how distant they were in the past. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'What did I know, what did I know'
<p>Imagery [setting]</p> <p>Explanation:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'hear the cold splintering, breaking'

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The house seems to be a cold place in both a literal and figurative sense. The son talks about the need to warm the house but ironically does not reflect this much needed warmth in his relationship with his father. • The father's repeated angry treatment towards his son is heightened by the fact that both parties are stuck in the same house and have nowhere to take a breather from each other. This also sheds light on the emotional strain in their relationship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'chronic angers of that house'
<p>Imagery [of the cold]</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <u>cold is emphasised early and often</u>, and seems to allude to the <u>cold reception</u> the speaker's father's efforts receive – none. Cold comes to symbolize solitude and hence the state of the familial relationship, which makes the reader feel sorry for a father who gives so much love yet receives none in return, particularly from the son. This points again to how emotionally distant the father and son are, even though they are living in the same house. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Those Winter Sundays' • 'blueblack cold' • 'driven out the cold'
<p>Form/Sentence length</p> <p>[Juxtaposition of long sentences with short sentences.]</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the first stanza, after a long sentence stating all the sacrifice involved in the father warming up the house for his son – having to wake up early on a weekend, ambling around the house in the cold, using hands already tired and somewhat injured from weekday labour – there is a sudden break of the flow with a short sentence, "No one ever thanked him". This is a contrast to the general structure of that stanza and the rest of poem as long sentences are usually used. • This short sentence makes the line in question stand out as it seems to be said so <u>matter-of-factly, as though the speaker took it for granted</u> that the father would warm the house for them and it was his job. Even the father sacrificed sleep and bore the cold and physical burden, it did not seem to be appreciated. • This juxtaposition of sentence length brings the reader's focus to how the father was taken for granted by the son despite his sacrifices. Although he comes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • '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' • 'Speaking indifferently to him'

across as an unapproachable father, the son also seems to be cold in his regard towards him, hence highlighting their strained relationship.	
Imagery [Sound imagery-dissonance, cacophony] Explanation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The poem carries very <u>harsh sounding words and suggests no warmth</u>. This heightens the tension between the two parties and reflects their broken relationship ties. It also makes the reader feel sad that the environment the father lives in has no warmth or love. The father is making a feeble attempt to create <u>warmth and love when there is none to begin with</u> – because his stern disposition would undo his efforts and his son doesn't reciprocate it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Cracked hands' 'blueblack cold' 'splintering, breaking'
Point of View [Through the eyes of the matured narrator] Explanation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through the shame and regret expressed by the presumably older and more matured persona, one can tell how much the father has sacrificed, how aloof the son was due to fear of his father, and as such how distant both father and son were from each other. The eventual understanding of the father's devotion to the family caused a deep pang of regret in the son. This is seen in the repetition of the lines 'What did I know, what did I know' in the third stanza. Through the narrator's final comprehension of his father's love by listing out the deeds that his father had quietly done for him, one can tell how the father's love for the family went unappreciated as the son did not even thank his father even though they live in the same house. 	'driven out the cold' 'polished my good shoes' 'What did I know, what did I know'