

Analyzing Poetry: “Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden

About this Lesson

This lesson gives students some strategies for approaching poetry analysis that can be used with any text. This lesson focuses on the attitude of the speaker toward his father. The lesson begins with connecting to prior knowledge, and continues with paraphrasing, questioning, and close reading strategies that all lead to understanding the speaker’s tone. The lesson ends with a writing prompt that asks students to explain how the speaker’s complex tone is developed through the poet’s use of diction, imagery, and details.

Passages for LTF® lessons are selected to challenge students while lessons and activities make texts accessible. Guided practice with challenging texts allows students to gain the proficiency necessary to read independently at or above grade level.

This lesson is included in Module 7: Determining Tone.

Objectives

Students will

- develop an understanding of the speaker’s tone through close reading and critical thinking.
- demonstrate understanding of the speaker’s tone through a written analysis of how the speaker’s tone is revealed through the poet’s choices.

Level

Grades Eight through Ten

Connection to Common Core Standards for English Language Arts

LTF Foundation Lessons are designed to be used across grade levels and therefore are aligned to the CCSS Anchor Standards. Teachers should consult their own grade-level-specific Standards. The activities in this lesson allow teachers to address the following Common Core Standards:

Explicitly addressed in this lesson

Code	Standard	Level of Thinking	Depth of Knowledge
R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it. Cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.	Understand	III
R.3	Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.	Analyze	III

R.4	Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.	Analyze	III
L.3	Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.	Understand	II
L.5	Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.	Understand	II
W.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.	Create	III
W.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.	Analyze	III

Implicitly addressed in this lesson

Code	Standard	Level of Thinking	Depth of Knowledge
R.10	Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.	Understand	II
L.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.	Understand	I
L.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.	Understand	I
L.6	Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.	Understand	II
W.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	Create	III
W.5	Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach	Evaluate	III
W.10	Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.	Apply	III

SL.1	Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	Understand	II
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LTF Skill Focus

The foundation for LTF English lessons is the Skill Progression Chart that identifies key skills for each domain, beginning with grade 6 and adding more complex skills at each subsequent grade level while reinforcing skills introduced at previous grade levels. The Skill Focus for each individual lesson identifies the skills actually addressed in that lesson.

Levels of Thinking					
Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Close Reading		Grammar		Composition	
<i>written, spoken, and visual texts</i>		<i>purposeful use of language for effect</i>		<i>written, spoken, and visual products</i>	
Reading Strategies Annotation Determining Audience Determining Author’s Purpose Inference Paraphrase Literary Elements Detail Diction connotation Imagery Rhetorical Shift Tone tone determined through diction, imagery, detail, point of view, and syntax Figures of Speech (Figurative Language) Apostrophe Metaphor extended/controlling				Types (modes) Expository analytical analysis of imaginative literature The Process of Composition Prewriting consideration of audience determination of purpose Drafting extended time timed Structural Elements Introduction thesis Body incorporation of quotes	

Connections to AP*

Poetry is included in the multiple choice section of the AP Literature and Composition exam and as one of the free response questions, which requires students to read and analyze a poem and write an analytical essay.

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Materials and Resources

- copies of Student Activity

Assessments

The following kinds of formative assessments are embedded in this lesson:

- guided questions
- writing assignment

The following additional assessments are located on the LTF website:

LTF Grade Level Assessments/Grade 9/Style Analysis/“Those Winter Sundays”

- multiple choice
- short answer
- free response

Teaching Suggestions

Teachers can use this lesson as a model to approaching style analysis with poetry. The pages that cover “Those Winter Sundays” specifically guide students through the suggested steps in the “Strategies for Reading and Analyzing Poetry” resource. This resource provides step-by-step instructions for reading and analyzing any poetry. Teachers may want to modify or shorten some of the steps.

Answers

Some of the answers for this lesson are subjective and will vary.

Activity One: Answers will vary

The speaker’s father got up on Sundays (as well as other days) when it was freezing outside to build a fire with his aching hands for his family.

No one ever thanked him for doing this.

The speaker would wake up and feel the cold dissipating because of the fire his father made.

After it got warm, the father would call everyone to wake up, and the speaker would get up, but he feared the anger that seemed to live in the house, so he wasn’t loving toward his father, who’d taken care of him.

He admits that he didn’t know that love sometimes means doing things that others don’t appreciate.

banked fires blaze. / (line 5)

him. / (line 5)

breaking. / (line 6)

shoes as well. / (line 12)

lonely offices? / (line 14)

Activity Two

1. *See above.*
2. *See above.*

Activity Three

Complete the SOAPS analysis below. **Answers will vary.**

S *Winter Sundays from the speaker’s past*

O *The speaker seems to be reflecting on the past—how his father acted and how he (the speaker) treated him.*

A *The speaker may be trying to apologize to his father or speak to his own children.*

P *The speaker may be trying to explain his own past behavior, or in some way, apologize for it.*

S *The speaker is thoughtful and grown up. He had a somewhat difficult childhood and now understands it more.*

tone *thoughtful, regretful*

Activity Four

Answers will vary.

Activity Five

Text	Device	Commentary
“Sundays too” (line 1)	detail	<i>The word “too” tells us that the father did this every day, even on “Sunday,” which should have been a day of rest. However, the speaker seems to have taken his father’s actions for granted because he says that “No one ever thanked him.”</i>
“blueblack”	diction	<i>“Blueblack” indicates a deep, dark cold, but it also might suggest a bruise, something that is painful.</i>
“cracked hands”	detail/imagery	<i>“Cracked hands” suggest that the father worked hard, probably at some physical job where his hands took abuse. He may also have work outside in the “weekday weather.”</i>
“banked fires blaze.”	detail/imagery	<i>The fact that the fires were “banked” suggests that they were ready to burst into flames at any time. This may relate to the anger that the speaker feared from his father too—that his temper might “blaze” at any time, without warning.</i>
“chronic angers”	detail	<i>The word “chronic” indicates that the anger was ongoing—unrelenting, which also may account for the “cold” that the speaker feels.</i>

Text	Device	Commentary
“indifferently”	diction	“Indifferently” suggests apathy and a lack of caring, which is reinforced by the fact that no one ever thanked the father.
“who had driven out the cold and polished my good shoes”	detail	These details are small acts that reveal the father’s emotions for his family, even though the words are not spoken.
“love’s”	diction	The fact that the speaker uses the word “love” to describe the acts performed by his father suggests that his understanding and feelings toward his father have changed.
“austere and lonely offices”	detail	The father’s demeanor may have been harsh and somber as he performed these “duties” of fatherhood, but he took them seriously and they reflected how he felt about his family.

Activity Six

1. No. The shift occurs between lines 12 and 13 when the speaker shifts from what he “remembers” to what he “understands.”
2. Indifferent, apathetic, “Speaking indifferently” (line 10), and “No one ever thanked him” (line 5)
3. Regretful, ashamed, “What did I know?” (line 13)

Analyzing Poetry:
“Those Winter Sundays”
By Robert Hayden

Activity One: The Title of the Poem

In this lesson you will analyze a poem called “Those Winter Sundays.” Think about what this title means to you. In the space below, write two or three sentences describing a typical “winter Sunday” at your house.

What do you think the poem might be about? _____

Read carefully the poem “Those Winter Sundays” and complete the accompanying activities. As you read and complete the activities, keep in mind the speaker’s attitude toward his father.

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. (5)

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, (10)
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?

Before you begin close reading for literary devices, there are several "steps" you can take whenever you read a poem to help you understand it better: paraphrasing, SOAPSTone, and questioning. Complete the activities, which guide you through these "steps."

Activity Two: Read Literally

1. Put a slash mark (/) at the end of each sentence.
2. In the left hand column next to the poem, write a paraphrase of each sentence of the poem.

Activity Three: SOAPStone

SOAPStone is an acronym to remind you to ask yourself several questions about a poem to establish some background for understanding.

S = subject of poem—What is the poem about?

O = occasion—What is the time and place of the poem and what might have prompted the poet to write it?

A = audience—To whom is the poet writing?

P = purpose—What is the poet's purpose? Is it to express an emotion, or tell a story, or convince someone (the audience) of something?

S = speaker—What do you know about the speaker, based on what is in the poem?

tone = tone—How would you initially describe the speaker's tone based on the SOAPS?

Complete the SOAPS analysis below

S _____

O _____

A _____

P _____

S _____

t _____

o _____

n _____

e _____

Activity Four: Levels of Questions

Level 1: questions for which the answer can be found in the text itself (**on the line**);

Level 2: questions for which the reader must make inferences based on the text (**between the lines**);

Level 3: questions which move outside the text to larger questions that are universal (**beyond the lines**).

For each sentence in the poem, write 2 questions—a level one question and a level two question. Answer your own questions, using textual evidence to support them. Then for the poem as a whole, write one level three question. (Sentence 1 is done for you as an example.)

Sentence 1:

Level 1: What days did the speaker's father get up to make a fire? Every day, "Sundays too"

Level 2: What kind of man was the speaker's father? He was hard-working, with "hands that ached from labor in the weekday weather," and he took care of his family even on "Sundays...made banked fires blaze."

Sentence 2:

Level 1: _____

Level 2: _____

Sentence 3:

Level 1: _____

Level 2: _____

Sentence 4:

Level 1: _____

Level 2: _____

Sentence 5:

Level 1: _____

Level 2: _____

Poem as a whole:

Level 3: _____

How does asking questions make you understand the poem better?

Activity Five: Devices Linked to Meaning

Now read closely to notice the diction, imagery, and details that the author uses to reveal his attitude toward his father. In the chart to the right, write textual evidence in the TEXT column, identify the type of literary device in the DEVICE column, and explain how the text reveals the speaker's attitude in the COMMENTARY column.

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. (5)

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
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Text	Device	Commentary
"Sundays too" (line 1)	detail	The "too" tells us that the father did this every day, even on "Sunday," which should have been a day of rest. However, the speaker seems to have taken this for granted because he says that "No one ever thanked him."

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?

(10)

Text	Device	Commentary

Reread your commentary from the chart above. How would you describe the speaker's attitude (tone) based on those comments?

Activity Six: Shifts

When trying to understand and analyze a speaker's tone, it is always important to look for complexity in that tone. In other words, a speaker in a poem rarely feels only one way about the subject, so look for shifts or changes in the poem. Those shifts can be revealed by changes in verb tense, point-of-view, diction choices, or images. When identifying a speaker's tone, use more than one adjective to describe it.

1. In this poem, does the speaker's attitude toward his father seem to be the same throughout the poem? If not, where does the shift in attitude occur? Explain.

2. What adjective would you use to describe the speaker's tone before the shift? _____

What textual evidence can you provide that supports that assertion? _____

3. What adjective would you use to describe the speaker's tone after the shift? _____

What textual evidence can you provide that supports that assertion? _____

Activity Seven: Writing Assignment

After reading and analyzing the poem, write an essay in which you explain how the poet's use of diction, imagery, and details reveals the speaker's complex attitude toward his father.