

Family relationship poems (Parent-Child)

Robert Hayden, “Those Winter Sundays,” p. 780

1. Pay close attention to word choice in this poem. What is significant about the word “too” in the first line of this poem? What is the effect of the repetition in the last two lines of the poem?
2. What seems to have been the narrator’s attitude toward his father? How can we tell? How has that attitude changed through time, as the narrator looks back on his childhood as an adult?
3. What in the poem suggests the father’s work and the family’s social class?
4. What attitudes seem to be present in the house? What words does the writer choose to suggest those attitudes?
5. What does the father’s morning actions tell us about the hopes and feelings the father has for his son?

Theodore Roethke, “My Papa’s Waltz,” p. 778

1. Who is the speaker in this poem?
2. What is the speaker’s attitude toward his father? How can we tell? What words suggest the ambivalence of the boy’s feelings toward his father?
3. How does the poem’s rhythm and rhyme scheme reflect the content of the poem?

Linda Pastan, “Marks,” p. 1224

1. How do the family members in this poem relate to the mother?
2. How does the mother plan to respond to her family’s judgments? How does she think her family will respond? What does she expect the family will realize?
3. What makes this poem humorous?

Lucille Clifton, “My Mama moved among the days,” p. 780

1. What do you think the speaker is trying to tell us about her mother and the relationship between the mother and her children?
2. What do you think the last three lines of the poem mean?
“she got us almost through the high grass
then seemed like she turned around and ran
right back in
right back on in”

Seamus Heaney’s “Digging” (p. 780) and Simon J. Ortiz’s “My Father’s Song” (p. 781)

1. List the similarities you see between these two poems. What do those similarities suggest about the fathers and their relationships with their sons?
2. List the differences between these two poems. What is significant about those differences?
3. How does the father in these two poems compare to the father in Hayden’s poem, “Those Winter Sundays”?

Everyone, for class discussion: What similarities do you see between these poems? What differences? What do the poems suggest about parent-child relationships?