



**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 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.

