

AP® ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

In the following poem by Robert Hayden (1913-1980), the speaker looks back on the strained relationship he had with his father during childhood. Read the poem carefully and in a well-organized essay discuss how Hayden contrasts the speaker's attitude towards his father as a child with how he now sees him as an adult. Consider how Hayden uses different literary techniques—such as diction, imagery, language, and syntax—and various poetic devices to convey his theme when formulating your response.

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
Line
5 banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

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,

10 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?

(1966)

AP Prompt: Study Guide

1. How are we supposed to feel about the speaker's father in the opening stanza? What is the significance of the word "too" (1) in the opening line? What impact does the caesura in the fifth line make before the speaker states, "No one ever thanked him" (5)?
2. Why do you think Hayden chose to repeat the hard "k" sound in the opening stanza? How does that sound contribute to the tone? In addition to consonance, what impact does the use of the internal rhymes "blueblack" (2) and "cracked" (3) and "banked" (5) and "thanked" (5) make on the reader?
3. Why does Hayden use an asyndeton between the present participles "splintering, breaking" (6) at the end of the first line of the second stanza? How do the present participles affect the meter in the opening and closing lines of the stanza? Why does Hayden use an enjambment at the end of the stanza?
4. What is the effect on the reader of starting the final stanza with a fragmented thought that continues the thought begun in the second stanza? How does that disconnect contribute to the meaning of the poem as a whole? What seems to be the speaker's feelings about his younger self in this poem?
5. Why does Hayden have the speaker repeat the phrase "What did I know, what did I know" (13) in the penultimate line of the poem? What does that repetition reveal about the speaker? How does the speaker feel about the father now that the speaker is an adult? What have caused his feelings to change over time?