

The Gift

Li-Young Lee

To pull the metal splinter from my palm
my father recited a story in a low voice.
I watched his lovely face and not the blade.
Before the story ended, he'd removed
5 the iron sliver I thought I'd die from.

I can't remember the tale,
but hear his voice still, a well
of dark water, a prayer.
And I recall his hands,
10 two measures of tenderness
he laid against my face,
the flames of discipline
he raised above my head. **A**

Had you entered that afternoon
15 you would have thought you saw a man
planting something in a boy's palm,
a silver tear, a tiny flame.
Had you followed that boy
you would have arrived here,
20 where I bend over my wife's right hand.

Look how I shave her thumbnail down
so carefully she feels no pain.
Watch as I lift the splinter out.
I was seven when my father
25 took my hand like this,
and I did not hold that shard
between my fingers and think,
Metal that will bury me,
christen it Little Assassin,
30 Ore Going Deep for My Heart.
And I did not lift up my wound and cry,
Death visited here!
I did what a child does
when he's given something to keep.
35 I kissed my father. **B**

ANALYZE VISUALS

How does this painting reflect the **mood** of the poem?

A CHARACTERS IN POETRY

What do you learn about the father from **images** in this stanza?

B MAKE INFERENCES

Reread lines 24–35. What can you infer about the feelings of the **speaker** after his father removes the splinter?

Those Winter Sundays

Robert Hayden



Vigour, Martine Levy: Musée d'Art Moderne, Troyes, France. Photo © Gerard Blot/
Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York.

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
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, **C**

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?

C MAKE INFERENCES

What can you infer about the **speaker's** attitude toward his family from clues in lines 1–9? Which details did you use to make this inference?



The Fish

Elizabeth Bishop

I caught a tremendous fish
and held him beside the boat
half out of water, with my hook
fast in a corner of his mouth.
5 He didn't fight.
He hadn't fought at all.
He hung a grunting weight,
battered and venerable
and homely. Here and there **A**
10 his brown skin hung in strips
like ancient wallpaper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wallpaper:
shapes like full-blown roses
15 stained and lost through age.
He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice,
20 and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down.
While his gills were breathing in
the terrible oxygen
—the frightening gills,
25 fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly—
I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
30 the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,

A FREE VERSE

Notice how the lines of this poem are unequal in length. How do the short lines affect the rhythm in the poem?

and the pink swim-bladder
 like a big peony.
 I looked into his eyes
 35 which were far larger than mine
 but shallower, and yellowed,
 the irises backed and packed
 with tarnished tinfoil
 seen through the lenses
 40 of old scratched isinglass.
 They shifted a little, but not
 to return my stare.
 —It was more like the tipping
 of an object toward the light. **B**
 45 I admired his sullen face,
 the mechanism of his jaw,
 and then I saw
 that from his lower lip
 —if you could call it a lip—
 50 grim, wet, and weaponlike,
 hung five old pieces of fish-line,
 or four and a wire leader
 with the swivel still attached,
 with all their five big hooks
 55 grown firmly in his mouth.
 A green line, frayed at the end
 where he broke it, two heavier lines,
 and a fine black thread
 still crimped from the strain and snap
 60 when it broke and he got away.
 Like medals with their ribbons
 frayed and wavering,
 a five-haired beard of wisdom
 trailing from his aching jaw. **C**
 65 I stared and stared
 and victory filled up
 the little rented boat,
 from the pool of bilge
 where oil had spread a rainbow
 70 around the rusted engine
 to the bailer rusted orange,
 the sun-cracked thwarts,
 the oarlocks on their strings,
 the gunnels—until everything
 75 was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
 And I let the fish go.

B VISUALIZE

Reread lines 34–44. What aspects of the fish's character can you "see" in this description of its eyes?

C IMAGERY

What senses does this description of the fish's face appeal to? What associations form in your mind about the fish?



CHRISTMAS SPARROW

BILLY COLLINS

The first thing I heard this morning
was a rapid flapping sound, soft, insistent—

wings against glass as it turned out
downstairs when I saw the small bird
5 rioting in the frame of a high window,
trying to hurl itself through
the enigma of glass into the spacious light. **D**

Then a noise in the throat of the cat
who was hunkered on the rug
10 told me how the bird had gotten inside,
carried in the cold night
through the flap of a basement door,
and later released from the soft grip of teeth.

On a chair, I trapped its pulsations
15 in a shirt and got it to the door,
so weightless it seemed
to have vanished into the nest of cloth.

But outside, when I uncupped my hands,
it burst into its element,
20 dipping over the dormant garden
in a spasm of wingbeats
then disappeared over a row of tall hemlocks.

D IMAGERY

What images describe the bird in lines 1–7? What senses do these images appeal to?

For the rest of the day,
I could feel its wild thrumming
25 against my palms as I wondered about
the hours it must have spent
pent in the shadows of that room,
hidden in the spiky branches
of our decorated tree, breathing there
30 among the metallic angels, ceramic apples, stars of yarn,
its eyes open, like mine as I lie in bed tonight **E**
picturing this rare, lucky sparrow
tucked into a holly bush now,
a light snow tumbling through the windless dark.

E VISUALIZE

What details help you
imagine how the bird
looks and feels as it hides
in the Christmas tree?



The Sloth

Theodore Roethke



In moving-slow he has no Peer.¹
You ask him something in his Ear,
He thinks about it for a Year;

And, then, before he says a Word
5 There, upside down (unlike a Bird),
He will assume that you have Heard—

A most Ex-as-per-at-ing Lug.
But should you call his manner Smug,
He'll sigh and give his Branch a Hug; **F**

10 Then off again to Sleep he goes,
Still swaying gently by his Toes,
And you just *know* he knows he knows.

F IMAGERY

Reread line 9. What does this image suggest about the sloth?

1. peer: equal.