

My father thought ...

Read through the poem and then answer the following questions. Be prepared to share your answers with others in your class:

1. This poem is from a collection called *Book of Matches*: each poem is supposed to be read in the time it takes for a match to burn down. Why do you think the poem itself does not have a title?
2. Explain what happens in the poem. Share your understanding of the event with a partner.
3. Look through the poem carefully; it is obvious from the quotation marks that some of the poem is the father talking. Which other words and phrases do you think might be the father's words?
4. Why does the father say he should have had the ring, 'through your nose instead'?
5. The first stanza describes the father's reaction to the ear-piercing; what does the second stanza describe?
6. Why, when the speaker describes the way he should have pierced his ear does he use the words, 'drive', 'skin' and 'wear' but when he describes what he did do he uses the words, 'pierce', 'flesh' and 'thread'?
7. The speaker explains that 'the hole became a sore, became a wound, and wept'. Bearing in mind the father's reaction to the ear-piercing, what double meaning might there be to these words?
8. How do you think the speaker feels about what he did? What makes you think this?
9. What do you think happens in the third stanza?
10. When the speaker says, '... my own voice breaking like a tear,' do you think it is pronounced as in, 'I was crying and a tear rolled down my cheek,' or, 'After falling over there was a tear in my suit'? What difference does the pronunciation make to our understanding of the poem?
11. Why do you think it comes 'no surprise'? Is it because the speaker has matured and learnt his lesson or is it because he has predictably become like his father?
12. Why does the voice come, 'from way back in the spiral of the ear'?
13. Can you find any sort of rhyme scheme in the poem? What is it and what is the effect of it?
14. What do you think the poem is about (more than the ear piercing)? Is it, for example, about rebelliousness, youth, parents, knowledge, something else?
15. Overall, what do you think of this poem?