

Follower

Read through the poem and then answer the questions below:

1. Why does Heaney write that his father worked 'with' the horse-plough rather than merely stating that he 'worked it'? Why is it important that he puts this in the middle line?
2. What sort of impression do you get of the speaker's father when he writes that, 'his shoulders globed like a full sail strung,?' Think about what the word 'globed' means and what we might infer from it. Consider as well the size of a 'full sail'.
3. 'The horses strained at his clicking tongue.' How powerful does Heaney's father appear from this statement? Think about how hard the horses are working and what it is that is making them work.
4. Why is the statement, 'An expert,' such a short sentence at the beginning of the second stanza? Again think about how powerful this makes the speaker's father sound.
5. Why has Heaney used the round vowel sounds of 'back' and 'sod' in the second stanza?
6. What is the purpose of the enjambement between the second and third stanza with 'At the headrig, with a single pluck / Of reins,?' Think about the regular rhythm of ploughing a field with a pause at each end of the furrow as the plough turns around.
7. Who is meant by the 'team' in the third stanza?
8. Why are the short 'a' sounds used in the third stanza ('Narrowed and angled at the ground, / Mapping the furrow exactly') to describe what the speaker's father does? Consider how short and sharp the sound is; does this hint at the father's personality?
9. In the fourth stanza the speaker says he 'tumbled ... fell'; what does this suggest about how the boy behaved around his father?
10. Why do you think the earth is described as 'polished' after the father has ploughed it?
11. In the fifth stanza the speaker says he wanted to grow up and plough like his father; why does Heaney pick out the physical aspects of closing his eye and stiffening his arm?
12. What does 'All I ever did was follow' suggest about the speaker's feelings about his achievements?
13. What is implied by the words 'follow' and 'his broad shadow'?
14. In the last stanza the speaker says he was a 'nuisance, tripping, falling, / Yapping always'. Whose words do you think these are? What makes you think this? Why has he used a list of three verbs?
15. The caesura which changes the subject from the past to the present, 'But today' has what effect?
16. In the last stanza, what has happened to the speaker's father? Why does the speaker repeat words to describe his father that he used to describe himself in previous stanzas?
17. What do you notice about the rhyme scheme of the poem? What is the purpose of it? Does it do anything or suggest anything to you?
18. What do you think the speaker's opinion of his father is? What makes you think this?