



UNIT

Those Winter Sundays

Robert Hayden (1913–1980)

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit, the students will be able to:

- use complex questions for a range of audiences.
- identify rhyme schemes and figurative language in poems.
- summarise complex concepts, processes, or information by paraphrasing them using correct language structure, transitional devices, own words and relevant punctuation marks. Make inferences to draw conclusions from, e.g. contextual information, writer's viewpoint and implied information.
- consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, or its etymology.
- demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing in different varieties of texts.
- write a dialogue between multiple people, giving narration / background in brackets, using conventions of the director's notes. Use vocabulary, tone and style appropriate to the context and relationship between the addresser and addressee..

Pre-reading:

- Why do some acts of love go unnoticed or unappreciated?
- How do you show appreciation to someone who quietly helps you?
- Can you think of any family traditions or routines that are done out of love but may be taken for granted?

About the Poet

Robert Hayden 1913–1980 was an American poet known for his reflective, emotional poetry about family, history, and African American experiences. Born in Detroit, he grew up in a foster home marked by hardship, which inspired many of his poems, including *Those Winter Sundays*. Educated at Detroit City College and the University of Michigan, Hayden became the first African American Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress (U.S. Poet Laureate). His famous works include *Middle Passage*, *Frederick Douglass*, and *Those Winter Sundays*. His poetry is celebrated for its emotional depth and vivid imagery.

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.

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,
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**?

Literary Devices

Imagery: Vivid descriptions like "*blueblack cold*" and "*cracked hands that ached*" create a sensory experience, highlighting the harsh conditions and the father's sacrifices.

Symbolism: Winter symbolises emotional distance, while fire represents the father's love and warmth.

Alliteration: The repetition of consonant sounds in "*weekday weather*" adds rhythm and emphasis.

Repetition: "*What did I know, what did I know*" highlights the speaker's regret and growing understanding.

Metaphor: "*Love's austere and lonely offices*" compares parental love to difficult, unappreciated duties.

Tone: The poem moves from a neutral, descriptive tone to a reflective and regretful tone, showing the speaker's emotional realisation.

Contrast: Warmth (father's love) is contrasted with cold (winter, emotional distance).

Free Verse: The poem lacks a consistent rhyme scheme or meter, creating a natural, conversational style.

Theme of *Those Winter Sundays* by Robert Hayden

The poem *Those Winter Sundays* explores the theme of unspoken parental love, where a father's quiet, selfless sacrifices go unnoticed and unappreciated by his child. Through vivid imagery of harsh winter mornings and the father's physical labour, the poem highlights how love is often shown through actions rather than affectionate words. It also captures the theme of regret and realisation, as the adult speaker looks back with remorse for failing to recognise his father's devotion. The tension in the household, hinted at by "chronic angers," adds depth to the emotional distance between father and child. Ultimately, the poem reveals that true love can be silent, enduring, and often unacknowledged.

Glossary:

Words	Meanings
ache	to feel a continuous pain that is not severe
austere	simple and plain; without any decorations
bank	to pile coal, etc. on a fire so that the fire burns slowly for a long time
blaze	to burn brightly and strongly
chronic	lasting a long time; difficult to solve
cracked	damaged with lines in its surface but not completely broken
indifferently	in a way that shows you are not interested in or do not care about somebody/something
lonely	where only a few people ever come or visit
office	a room, set of rooms or building where people work
splinter	to break, or to make something break, into small, thin, sharp pieces

Reading and Critical Thinking

A. Answer the following questions:

1. What do you think is Robert Hayden's attitude towards the father's sacrifices in the poem?
2. How does the speaker's viewpoint change from childhood to adulthood? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
3. Do you think the poet is critical of his younger self? Why or why not?
4. How does Robert Hayden use imagery and symbolism to convey complex emotions in the poem?
5. Find an example of personification in the poem and explain its effect.
6. Why is the poem written in free verse? How does this enhance its meaning?
7. Explain the significance of the title *Those Winter Sundays*. Why does the poet use the plural form "Sundays"?
8. Why does the speaker use the term "blueblack cold" to describe the winter morning?

B. Choose the correct option for each question.

1. Who is the central figure in the poem besides the speaker?

- a. the speaker's mother
- b. the speaker's friend
- c. the speaker's father
- d. the speaker's sibling

2. What time of day does the father wake up, and what does he do first?

- a. early in the morning, to read the newspaper
- b. late at night, to prepare dinner
- c. early in the morning, to light the fire and warm the house
- d. midday, to fix broken furniture

3. How does the speaker describe the father's hands?

- a. soft and delicate
- b. cold and lifeless
- c. cracked and aching from labour
- d. clean and smooth

4. What did the father do for the speaker that went unnoticed during childhood?

- a. cooked all meals
- b. bought expensive gifts
- c. polished the speaker's shoes and warmed the house
- d. told stories every night

5. What does the speaker mean by "chronic angers" in the house?

- a. constant fights between siblings
- b. a long-lasting, tense atmosphere in the home
- c. temporary disagreements between neighbours
- d. anger towards the cold weather

C. Read the following lines from the poem and draw inferences from context.

1. No one ever thanked him.

- What does this suggest about the father's efforts?
- How does this affect the tone of the poem?

2. Cracked hands that ached from labor in the weekday weather.

- What can you infer about the father's job?
- What does the description of his hands suggest about his life?

3. I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.

- What does this imagery tell you about the winter morning?
- Why do you think the poet uses the words "splintering, breaking"?

D. Read the following lines and explain the implied meaning.

1. Fearing the chronic angers of that house.

- What does "chronic angers" imply about the family's emotional environment?
- Do you think the anger was directed at the speaker? Why or why not?

2. What did I know, what did I know of love's austere and lonely offices?

- Why does the speaker repeat "What did I know"?
- What does "love's austere and lonely offices" suggest about the nature of parental love?

3. The poem describes the father's actions but does not mention any direct communication between the father and the speaker.

- What does this silence between them suggest?
- How does it affect the emotional impact of the poem?

E. Read the poem 'Follower' by Seamus Heaney and compare it with 'Those

Winter Sundays' by Robert Hayden. Use the following points for comparison:

- Theme
- Imagery
- Tone
- Relationship between parent and child

Vocabulary and Grammar

A. Use a dictionary to find the following information for each word.

Word	Dictionary meaning	Pronunciation	Part of Speech	Etymology
chronic				
indifferently				
offices				
austerity				
warmed				

B. Use a thesaurus (digital or print) to list two synonyms for each word.

C. Write a sentence for each word using it in the context of the poem.

Punctuation

Punctuation means the correct use of marks (points or stops) in writing. It helps readers understand a text accurately. Misusing punctuation can change the meaning of a sentence.

The main punctuation marks are as follows:

Punctuation Mark	Symbol	Usage	Example
Full Stop	.	Ends a sentence.	The meeting starts at 9 AM.
Comma	,	Separates items in a list or pauses in a sentence.	I need to buy eggs, bread, and butter.

Question Mark	?	Ends a direct question.	How did you complete the assignment?
Exclamation Mark	!	Expresses strong emotions or after interjections.	Oh no! I missed the bus.
Colon	:	Introduces a list, explanation, or quotation.	The ingredients are: flour, sugar, and eggs.
Semi-colon	;	Links closely related independent clauses.	He finished his homework; she was still studying.
Apostrophe	'	Shows possession or forms contractions.	The teacher's desk is tidy. (Possession) It's a great day. (Contraction)
Quotation Marks	" " or ' '	Encloses direct speech or titles.	She said, "I'll meet you at the café."

D. Use appropriate punctuation marks in the following sentences.

- We had a wonderful vacation in Skardu it was a memorable experience.
- Some students prefer studying alone others enjoy group discussions.
- What time will you arrive at the wedding tonight?
- Father had to undergo surgery he had been feeling unwell for weeks.
- Can you explain why she was so angry earlier?

Oral Communication

- In a group, discuss how people sometimes fail to recognise acts of love and kindness from their parents or elders.
- Share a personal experience where you later realised someone cared for you more than you initially thought.
- Debate: "Actions speak louder than words when it comes to expressing love."

Writing Skills

- Imagine you are the speaker, now an adult, writing a letter to your father. Express your gratitude and regret for not understanding his love earlier.
- Write a reflective paragraph on how this poem changes your

understanding of love and sacrifice.

- C. Paraphrase the entire poem in a single, clear paragraph, maintaining its main ideas. Use your own words and appropriate transitional devices (e.g., however, despite, therefore).
- D. Write a dialogue between three family members (a father, a mother, and a teenage child) discussing the teenager's choice of profession. Use appropriate vocabulary, tone, and style based on their relationships. Include narration and background in brackets, following the conventions of the director's notes.

Instructions for Writing the Dialogue

1. Characters and Setting:

- Include three characters: a father, a mother, and a teenage child.
- Set the scene briefly (e.g., in the living room after dinner).

2. Dialogue Style:

- Use a natural, conversational tone.
- Reflect each character's personality (e.g., father may be practical, mother empathetic, child curious).

3. Narration:

- Use bracketed narration for actions or emotions (e.g., [The father sighs.]).

4. Content:

- Begin with a natural lead-in to discussing the child's choice of profession.
- Show different perspectives (parents' advice, child's interests).
- Include a brief conflict or differing opinions, with a resolution.

5. Language:

- Use clear, polite, and age-appropriate vocabulary.

E. Explain the following lines with reference to the context:

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?