

Boost Free Lessons - Year 9 English

Lesson 13: Reading Poetry: Tone and Imagery

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Read the poem below carefully. The line numbers will help you refer to specific parts of the poem in your answers.

Night Shift

- 1 My father comes home at the hour
- 2 the birds start, which he says
- 3 is the worst part, being the only one
- 4 coming in while the world winds up.
- 5
- 6 He takes his boots off on the step.
- 7 Eleven years and he has never once
- 8 worn them past the door,
- 9 though nobody asked him not to.
- 10
- 11 The kettle. The second cupboard.
- 12 The mug with the chip on the handle
- 13 that he turns away from himself
- 14 so the good side faces out,
- 15 though there is nobody to see it.
- 16
- 17 By the time I come down
- 18 he is asleep in the chair
- 19 with the radio still going,
- 20 some man talking about the roads.
- 21
- 22 I turn it off. He does not wake.
- 23 The birds are properly started now,
- 24 loud enough to be a nuisance,
- 25 and he sleeps through all of it,
- 26 the way you sleep through the thing
- 27 you have finally stopped hearing.



Worked Example 1

Explain how the detail of the mug in lines 11 to 14 reveals the father's character.

1. A small physical action can carry more than a description of personality.
2. He turns the chipped side away so the good side faces out. This is care taken over something trivial.
3. The qualifier matters most: *though there is nobody to see it* (line 14).
4. The habit is not performed for anyone, so it shows something private and consistent rather than a display.

Model: The father turns the chipped mug so “the good side faces out” (line 13) even though “there is nobody to see it” (line 14). The care is habitual rather than performed, which shows a quiet, private orderliness maintained for himself alone.

Remember: In poetry, read **small actions** as evidence of character, and pay attention to qualifiers such as *though nobody asked*. Tone is the poet's attitude, and it is usually shown rather than stated.



Question 1: Answer the following questions. Give the line numbers you used in your answers.

1. At what time of day does the father come home?

2. What does he say is the worst part?

3. Where does he take his boots off?

4. How many years has he done this?

5. What is still going when the speaker comes down?

6. What is the radio presenter talking about?



Question 2: Answer the following questions in full sentences.

1. What is the tone of the poem towards the father? Explain how it is created.

2. Explain the effect of the short phrases describing the kettle and the cupboard.

3. Why does the poet include the detail that nobody asked him to remove his boots?

4. Explain the simile in the last two lines.

5. What is the poem about, beyond a man returning from work?





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Answers and Model Responses: Reading Poetry: Tone and Imagery**Question 1**

1. At dawn, when the birds start.
2. Being the only one coming in while the world is starting its day.
3. On the step, outside the door.
4. Eleven years.
5. The radio.
6. The roads.

Question 2

1. Model: The tone is affectionate and quietly admiring, but never sentimental. It is created through observed detail rather than statement. The speaker never says they love their father, and instead records habits such as the boots and the mug, which invites the reader to draw the conclusion themselves.
2. Model: *The kettle. The second cupboard.* The clipped fragments mirror a routine performed without thought, and the absence of verbs makes the actions feel automatic rather than chosen.
3. Model: It shows the habit is self-imposed. If someone had asked, it would show obedience. Because nobody did, it shows consideration he maintains for his own reasons.
4. Model: Sleeping through “the thing you have finally stopped hearing” suggests exhaustion so complete that the noise no longer registers. It also implies something sadder, that a person adapts to what wears them down until they no longer notice it, which may apply to the shifts as much as to the birds.
5. Model: It is about the cost of unnoticed work and the love shown through routine rather than words. The father's care appears in small, private habits, and the speaker's care appears in turning off the radio without waking him. Neither is ever stated directly, which is what makes the poem quiet.

