

4. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Heaney states that poetry has “the power to remind us that we are **hunters and gatherers of values.**”
 - a. What does Heaney mean when he says that we should be “hunters and gatherers of values?”
 - b. What kinds of social values might parents and grandparents pass down to their children? What values have you learned from your family?

Read the prompt below:

In the poem “Digging” by Seamus Heaney, the speaker uses the motif of *digging* to reflect on the lives of his father and grandfather and on his connection to these men.

In a well-written essay, analyze the poetic techniques, such as tone and symbolism, that the writer uses to explore the role he plays in perpetuating his family and cultural heritage.

5. What does the phrase “poetic techniques” mean? What techniques do you think would be useful to discuss in this essay?
6. What are the abstract ideas you are asked to discuss in this essay?
7. What background information is included in the prompt that is important to include in your essay?

Activity Two: Reading the Poem

Read carefully the poem “Digging” by Seamus Heaney. As you read, note any striking or vivid words or phrases. Then, answer the questions that follow.

“Digging”

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground.

(5) My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills¹
Where he was digging.

(10) The course boot nestled on the lug,¹ the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

(15) By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner’s bog,
Once I carried him milk in a bottle

(20) Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

(25) The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Off soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awakened in my head.
But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.

Between my thumb
(30) The squat pen rests.
I’ll dig with it.

¹**lug:** the top projection
of the blade on a shovel

Activity Three: Symbolism and Motif

Symbolism is the use of any object, person, place, or action that has a meaning in itself while standing for something larger than itself, such as a quality, attitude, belief, or value.

1. What tool or implement does the speaker associate with his father? With his grandfather?
2. Look again at what the father and grandfather were digging. How do these things represent some of the basic necessities of life? Complete the chart below to record your observations.

Person Who is Digging	What the Person is Digging	What Basic Necessity is Represented?

3. Why do you think the speaker uses this tool to represent his father and grandfather?

Read carefully the sentence in line 28: *“But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.”*

4. Paraphrase the sentence.
5. What is the rhetorical function of the word “but” at the beginning of this sentence?
6. What tool or implement does the speaker associate with himself?
7. How can the speaker “dig with” this implement?

8. In the simile featured in lines 1-2, the speaker compares his pen to a gun. In what ways are these two things similar?

9. How does this comparison impact your understanding of the speaker’s character? His values?

A **motif** is a pattern or strand of imagery or symbolism in a work of literature.

10. Notice that the title consists of only one word—“Digging.” Where is this word (or another form of this word) repeated in the poem? Highlight or underline any reference or connection to digging in the poem itself.

11. Why do you think the speaker repeats in lines 29-30 the words he uses in lines 1-2?

12. Notice that the speaker’s descriptions of his father and his grandfather are “bookended” by lines 1-2 and 29-30. How does this repetition relate to the cycle of life established in the poem?

13. Does the speaker feel connected to his father and grandfather? How does this motif of *digging* unify the poem?

Activity Four: Determining Tone

1. Below, list at least five words that describe the speaker’s attitude toward his father and his grandfather.

Circle the two words you think best describe this attitude.

2. Keeping in mind the motif of “digging” in this poem, complete the chart below:

- Fill in the left column below with examples of diction, imagery, and figurative language that reveal the speaker’s attitude toward his father and his grandfather.
- In the right column, explain how or why the concrete devices reveal the tone(s) you identified above.

The tone(s) that best describe the speaker’s attitude toward his father and grandfather are

_____ (and/yet) _____

Literary Device (diction, imagery, figurative language)	Commentary (How or why the device reveals tone)

- How does the speaker’s attitude toward his father and his grandfather reveal his own recognition about the role he plays in continuing his family and cultural heritage?

Activity Five: Writing the Essay

Re-read the prompt below:

In the poem “Digging” by Seamus Heaney, the speaker uses the motif of *digging* to reflect on the lives of his father and grandfather and on his connection to these men.

In a well-written essay, analyze the poetic techniques, such as tone and symbolism, that the writer uses to explore the role he plays in perpetuating his family and cultural heritage.

Following your teacher’s instructions, write an essay that addresses the prompt. When you have finished your draft, use the list below to evaluate your work.

	I have included a thesis statement that offers an assertion about the poem’s use of symbolism and tone in its exploration of the speaker’s family heritage.
	I have included two or three pieces of evidence in each body paragraph.
	I incorporated the evidence into sentences with my own words.
	I explained how the evidence reveals the speaker’s attitudes toward his father and his grandfather.
	I highlighted evidence and analysis in two different colors to be sure that there is more analysis than evidence.