At a Glance

Recommended for Reading Levels: 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Genre: Poetry
Topic: Topic
Author: Li-Young Lee
Source: Rose (1986)

Difficulty Index: Considerate . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Challenging

Structure: 
Purpose: 
Richness: 
Relationships: 
Vocabulary: 
Style: 

Lexile Measure: 950L

The Gift

To pull the metal splinter from my palm
my father recited a story in a low voice.
I watched his lovely face and not the blade.
Before the story ended, he’d removed the iron sliver I thought I’d die from.

I can’t remember the tale,
but hear his voice still, a well of dark water, a prayer.
And I recall his hands,
two measures of tenderness he laid against my face,
the flames of discipline he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon you would have thought you saw a man
planting something in a boy’s palm, a silver tear, a tiny flame.
Had you followed that boy you would have arrived here,
where I bend over my wife’s right hand.

Look how I shave her thumbnail down so carefully she feels no pain.
Watch as I lift the splinter out.
I was seven when my father took my hand like this,
and I did not hold that shard between my fingers and think,
Metal that will bury me,
christen it Little Assassin,
Ore Going Deep for My Heart.
And I did not lift up my wound and cry,
Death visited here!
I did what a child does when he’s given something to keep.
I kissed my father.

Purpose: To demonstrate how a father’s love can have a lasting effect on his son.
See especially: Q7, 10

Spotlight On: Li Young Lee
Li Young Lee (1957-), although ethnically Chinese, never lived in China. Because of his father’s politics, his parents were exiled before he was born. Lee was born in Indonesia, but in 1958 his father was taken as a political prisoner and again exiled. Over the next five years, the Lee family lived in Hong Kong, Macau, and Japan, finally moving to the United States in 1964. As a boy, Lee found it difficult to adjust to life in the United States. He didn’t talk for a long time because he was embarrassed that he didn’t speak English.

Ideas for Connected Writing Activities
- Write an essay about an “ordinary” thing someone did for you when you were young that you now realize was an extraordinary gift. Incorporate the technique of “flashback.”
- Turn your essay into a poem
1. Who is the narrator of the poem?
   A. A young boy (OOP1, the narrator is a boy for part of the scene described)
   ✓ B. A man
   C. A father (OOP2)
   D. A wife (OOP2)

2. Why does the father tell a story to his son (lines 2-5)?
   A. To tell him about his childhood (OOB)
   B. To discipline him (OOP2, line 12)
   ✓ C. To calm him down while he removes a splinter
   D. To pray (OOB)

3. In lines 9-12, how does the narrator describe his father’s hands?
   A. As gentle (OOP1)
   B. As sources of punishment (OOP1)
   C. As hot (OOP2, “flames of discipline,” line 12)
   ✓ D. Both (a) and (b)

4. Who are the “boy” and “man” referred to in lines 15-16?
   ✓ A. The narrator and his father
   B. The narrator and his son (OOP2)
   C. Two people staying in the narrator’s house (OOB)
   D. The poem doesn’t include enough details to tell (OOB)

5. In line 17, why does the narrator describe the splinter as “a silver tear, a tiny flame”?
   A. To show that the splinter is made of silver (OOP2)
   B. To show that the splinter is on fire (OOP2)
   C. To show that the boy is crying (OOP2)
   ✓ D. To show how the splinter looks and feels

6. How old was the boy when his father pulled the splinter out of his hand?
   A. 3 years old (OOB)
   ✓ B. 7 years old
   C. 17 years old (OOB)
   D. The poem doesn’t include enough details to tell (OOB)
### Grades 8-9 • Poetry • “The Gift”

#### 7. Why is the narrator MOST LIKELY writing about his father?
- A. He misses his father. (OOB)
- B. He wants to remember the story his father told him. (OOP2, line 6)
- ✓ C. Pulling a splinter for his wife reminds him of when his father did the same for him.
- D. His father died. (OOB)

**MI2: Determine a singular meaning from the sum total of a particular paragraph**

#### 8. What is the purpose of the third stanza (lines 14-20)?
- ✓ A. To transition from the past to the present
- B. To compare the size of his wife’s splinter to the one he had as a boy (OOP2)
- C. To reflect on his father’s cruelty (OOB)
- D. To emphasize the many years that have passed since he was a child (OOP2)

**MI3: Determine implicit meaning by understanding the organization of information in the text**

#### 9. What is the “gift” the title refers to?
- A. The splinter (OOP1)
- B. A silver tear (OOP1)
- C. A story (OOP1)
- ✓ D. His father’s tenderness

**MI1: Determine implicit meaning from words in context**

#### 10. What is the main point the author is trying to convey through this poem?
- ✓ A. Demonstrations of a father’s love have a long-lasting effect on a child.
- B. A childhood brush with death can haunt someone forever. (OOP2, line 5, 21-32)
- C. Removing splinters must be done very carefully. (OOP1)
- D. History repeats itself in every generation. (OOB)

**MI2: Determine a singular meaning from the sum total of a particular paragraph**
The Gift

1 To pull the metal splinter from my palm
   my father recited a story in a low voice.
   I watched his lovely face and not the blade.
   Before the story ended, he’d removed
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   between my fingers and think,
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Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by filling in the circle for the best answer on your answer sheet.

1. Who is the narrator of the poem?
   A. A young boy
   B. A man
   C. A father
   D. A wife

2. Why does the father tell a story to his son (lines 2-5)?
   A. To tell him about his childhood
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    B. A childhood brush with death can haunt someone forever.
    C. Removing splinters must be done very carefully.
    D. History repeats itself in every generation.
FAST-R Answer Sheet

Name

School

Date

Grade

Class

Passage Title

Teacher Name

Completely fill the circle for the correct answer.

1. A B C D
2. A B C D
3. A B C D
4. A B C D
5. A B C D
6. A B C D
7. A B C D
8. A B C D
9. A B C D
10. A B C D

Write your answer to the open response prompt in the lined space below. if your teacher directs you to do so.

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RESEARCH: Y N

OPEN RESPONSE: 1 2 3 4