Digging

**Sample Poetry Response**

Student Response:

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:   
 My father, digging, I look down

Til his straining rump among the flowerbeds

Bends low, conies up twenty years away

Stooping in rhythm through potato drills   
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, 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.

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

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

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap   
 Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge

Through living roots awaken in my head.

But I've no spade to follow men like them

Between my finger and thumb   
The squat pen rests.

I'Il dig with it.

Seamus Heaney

This poem beautifully conveys the differences that can exist between generations. In the poem, the speaker describes the manual labor that his father and grandfather performed throughout their lifetimes. The speaker contrasts their work to his writing.

The speaker opens with the line, "Between my finger and my thumb/the squat pen rests .... " Then he shifts to the description of his father digging in the garden outside of his window. The description of his digging is very detailed and figurative. The speaker uses words and images that appeal to almost all the reader's senses. He describes the "clean rasping sound" the spade makes as he digs and the "bright edge" of the spade. He talks about the "cool hardness" of the new potatoes in their hands and the "cold smell of potato mould." All these descriptive phrases and passages.make the poem more vivid and realistic. The speaker obviously admired his father and grandfather for their work. The bulk of the poem is about their work and experiences. The speaker includes phrases of praise such as "By God, the old man could handle a spade. Just like his old man," and "My grandfather cut more turf in a day than any other man on toner's bog." However, even though the speaker admires bis father and grandfather, he knows it is not his place to follow in their footsteps. He says, But I’ve no spade to follow men like them." At that point, at the end of the poem, he returns to his opening lines, "Between my finger and my thumb the squat pen rests," and then adds, "I'll dig with it." Here the speaker comes to the realization that he is not like his father and grandfather in the physical sense, but he can be like them on some level. He can use his own skills and talents to "dig" just as they did.

I think sometimes it's hard fur both parents and their children to come to that sort of realization. Many parents followed the same path their parents did, or their parents wanted them to, and expect their children to do the same. This often comes in the form of attending the same school, entering the same profession, joining the same organizations and other such "defining" things. Of course there is nothing wrong with keeping up traditions such as those if it works for the individuals. On the other band, if the son/daughter obviously does not have the talent or inclination or whatever else is needed to fulfill that tradition there can be a problem.

Sometimes parents are blind to their children's wishes because they are so caught up in reliving their moments of glory through their children. Sometimes the children want to.please their parents so much they try too hard to do what they think the parent would want them to,when in fact, the parent just wants them to be happy. In any event, the children's real wishes/talents are being overlooked.

Nancy Watson