

Follower

What is turned up and revealed as we plough the lines?

Using a copy of 'Follower', ask students to do the following:

- Underline 'His shoulders globed like a full sail strung'; 'clicking tongue' and 'His eye narrowed and angled at the ground'.
- Highlight 'expert', 'set', 'fit', 'without breaking', 'a single pluck of reins' and 'exactly'.
- Mark in another way – a different colour, perhaps, 'shafts', 'furrow', 'wing', 'pointed sock', 'headrig' and 'team'.

Ask them why certain words and phrases have been picked out and grouped together? What do they have in common? (It seems to me that the first set is about the writer's keen observation and memory; the second is about the sureness and expertise of his father at work; and the third is to do with the use of specific terminology, in this case agricultural.)

Look at the rest of the poem. Are any of the above repeated? Are there other groupings which might be highlighted?

Do these types of words and phrases occur in other Heaney poems? In poems by other writers?

The poem very clearly falls into two halves. It might be worth seeing if a comparison table works:

First half

Father was in control

Son was a nuisance then.

Father had a skill

Father carried him.

Second half

Son stumbled

His father is a nuisance now.

Son has a very different skill

Now he is responsible for his father (and so on)

Use as many of these statements as you think your students need in order to get the idea.