

Work and the Human Condition Poetry Workshop

1 hour: The titles of the poem(s) for each group are up on the board. Sign up for a group (5 students max in each).

First-- read the poem(s) aloud, taking turns with stanzas where it makes sense. Make sure each of you has a chance to read.

If you have two longer poems, choose the one you'll focus on. If two short—do both.

Now-- read the poem on your own, marking the passages/images that stand out to you.

Share those selections, then answer the following questions about the poem(s):

You should each take notes.

What does this poem say about the nature of work?

How does it address the questions we've been thinking about all year? (it won't address all, but will address one or more):

- Why is work important in a complete human life?
- What roles can it play both for an individual and for the whole social system?
- What ways of working should a person strive to practice?
- Who does what work?

Formal Analysis can help you notice how the poem works. Ask--

- Who is the speaker of the poem; that is, from whose perspective do we "hear" the poem?
- What is the tone of the poem? --sad, ironic, elegiac, story-telling, humorous, some combination—cite text to support your assertion.
- What is described? Why did the writer select these things and not something else?
- What kinds of patterns are evident? What are the sentence structures—short, long, simple, complex, repetitive?
- What do you notice about the actual sounds of the words—consonants and vowels, long and short, clipped, repeated? How do the sounds work in to create meaning and mood?
- What images are used?
- What is the meter, the rhythm pattern? (scan the poem or a section of it.)
- What effect does this regular pattern have? How do breaks in regularity affect the meaning?

Choose reader(s) and prepare to read your poem aloud to the class (choose one if you have two) and to share a bit about your analysis.