

FOLLOWER

Seamus Heaney

SEAMUS HEANEY (b. 1939), widely acclaimed as "the most important Irish poet since Yeats", is the eldest of nine children. He was born on his family's farm near Belfast in County Derry, Northern Ireland. He attended local schools and earned degree in English from Queen's University, Belfast. He took a teacher's certificate in English at St. Joseph's and began a career as a teacher. His first volume of poetry, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), won several prizes. His works include *Selected Poems: 1966- 1987* (1990), *The Spirit Level* (1996), *Opened Ground: Selected Poems, 1966- 1996* (1998) and two volumes of essays, *The Government of the Tongue* (1988) and *The Redress of Poetry* (1995). He has taught at Oxford University, the University of California at Berkeley, and Harvard University. In 1995, Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. In the poem 'The Follower', Heaney beautifully brings out how with the passage of time the role of a father and his son undergoes a change.



- A. Work in small groups and discuss the questions given below:**
1. How do people live in countryside?
 2. How is agriculture important for us?
 3. What do you understand by fertile soil?
 4. Have you ever ploughed or seen a man ploughing? Briefly narrate the experience.

FOLLOWER

My father worked with a horse-plough,
His shoulders globed like a full sail strung
Between the shafts and the furrow.
The horses strained at his clicking tongue.

An expert. He would set the wing
And fit the bright steel- pointed sock,
The sod rolled over without breaking.
At the headrig, with a single pluck

Of reins, the sweating team turned round
And back into the land. His eye
Narrowed and angled at the ground.
Mapping the furrow exactly.



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B.1. Answer the following questions briefly :

1. Why is the 'father' called an expert?
2. What did he look like?
3. How resolute was he at his work?
4. What was he observing when he was ploughing?
5. Why were his eyes 'narrowed and angled'?
6. What does 'mapping' suggest about his ploughing?

I stumbled in his hob-nailed wake.
Fell sometimes on the polished sod,
Sometimes he rode me on his back
Dipping and rising to his plod.

I wanted to grow up and plough,
To close one eye, stiffen my arm.
All I ever did was follow
In his broad shadow round the farm.

I was a nuisance, tripping, falling,
Yapping always. But today
It is my father who keeps stumbling
Behind me, and will not go away.



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B.2. Answer the following questions briefly :

1. What was the child doing while his father was at work?
2. What did the child wish while following his father?
3. How was the child 'a nuisance'?
4. Why does the father not go away?

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

shafts (n): two long bars used for fastening a vehicle to a horse or other animal

furrow (n): a line that a farmer digs in the soil with a plough when he or she ploughs

wake (n): after something or someone

sod (n): a piece of land that has grass and root growing in it

plod (n): a way of walking with slow heavy steps

nuisance (n): something annoying

yapping (v): talking a lot about nothing significant

C. 1. LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Who is the follower in the poem - the father, the son or both? Explain.
2. Write a summary of the poem.
3. How does time influence the relationship between the son and the father?
4. Describe how the poet has conveyed the feeling of the farmer's son.

C. 2. GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following in **groups** or **pairs**:

- a. How can we improve our agriculture?
- b. Low income of farmers is a cause of great concern in India.
- c. Generation gap

C. 3. COMPOSITION

Write a paragraph in about 100 words on the following:

- a. Use of chemical fertilizers
- b. Use of modern techniques in farming

D. WORD STUDY**D.1. Dictionary Use**

Ex. 1. Correct the spelling of the following words:

tonge sweting stiften stumbing diping

Ex. 2. Use the following nouns as verbs:

eye map ground nail fall shadow

D.2. Word-formation

Read the following sentences carefully:

My father worked with a *horse-plough*....
I stumbled in his *hob-nailed* wake....

You see that in the first sentence a compound word '*horse-plough*' is made by combining two nouns 'horse' and 'plough' and it functions as a noun. In the second sentence the compound word '*hob-nailed*' consists of a noun 'hob' and 'nailed' and it functions like an adjective. Several compound words can be made by combining two similar or different parts of speech. Now form as many compound words as you can by using words given below in different ways. You may use different derivatives of the same word, e.g.

break + fast = breakfast

breaking + news = breaking-news

fast

write

fit

look

point

heart

blank

break

match

steel

conscious

colour

melt

D.3. Word-meaning

Find from the poem words the meanings of which have been given in **Column A**. The last part of each word is given in **Column B**:

Column A

a way of walking with slow heavy steps

something that is annoying

talking a lot usually about nothing important

after something or someone

Column B

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D.4. Registers

Ex.1. Find out from the poem the words which are used in agriculture, e.g. *plough*

Ex.2. Write 10 words which are used with specific meanings in the film industry, e.g. *box office*.

E. GRAMMAR

Examine the following forms of the verb 'go' carefully:

go

went

gone

going

goes

Ex. Give different forms of the given verbs as illustrated above:

work

stumble

follow

roll

ride

sweat

rise

turn

grow

Hob

F. ACTIVITY

What kind of plough is used in your village/ locality? Trace out its origin and other details by talking to the elderly people in your family/ society. Do a project work on plough.