GETTING TO THE OF THE POEM

Lesson activity to accompany SMILER technique: working on the first ten minutes of the exam:

* Reading the question
* Reading annotating the poem in the light of the question
* Writing an introduction based on the ‘Subject’ section of SMILER

PURPOSE: To train yourself to be able to look at a poem under timed conditions, and get to the heart of what it’s about.

REMINDER:

**Subject**

* Who is the narrator (the poet, fictional first person, third person)?
* Are there other characters in the poem?
* Is there a distinctive setting or sense of place?
* Does the poem tell a story?
* Is there a message, moral or conclusion?

*ACTIVITY*

***You are working within a group of three, with three poems.***

***Individually, you will have thirty minutes to look at three poems – taking ten minutes to look at each. After the first ten minutes, you will pass the poem on and do the same for the second poem. In another ten minutes, you will look at a third. During each ten minute period, you will be expected to:***

* ***Look at the question accompanying poem***
* ***Annotate the poem in the light of the question***
* ***Write an introduction based on ‘Subject’ in the SMILER technique.***

***After the 30 minutes is up, there will be an opportunity to compare and assess responses using the mark scheme.***

**Follower**

My father worked with a horse-plough,  
His shoulders globed like a full sail strung  
Between the shafts and the furrow.  
The horse 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.   
  
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.

**Seamus Heaney**

**Island Man**

Morning  
and island man wakes up  
to the sound of blue surf  
in his head  
the steady breaking and wombing  
  
wild seabirds  
and fishermen pushing out to sea  
the sun surfacing defiantly  
from the east  
of his small emerald island  
he always comes back groggily groggily  
  
Comes back to sands  
of a grey metallic soar  
to surge of wheels  
to dull North Circular roar  
  
muffling muffling  
his crumpled pillow waves  
island man heaves himself  
  
Another London day

**Grace Nichols**

**The Lesson**

“Your father’s gone,” my bald headmaster said.  
His shiny dome and brown tobacco jar  
Splintered at once in tears. It wasn’t grief.  
I cried for knowledge which was bitterer  
Than any grief. For there and then I knew  
That grief has uses – that a father dead  
Could bind the bully’s fist a week or two;  
And then I cried for shame, then for relief.

I was a month past ten when I learnt this:  
I still remember how the noise was stilled  
in school-assembly when my grief came in.  
Some goldfish in a bowl quietly sculled  
Around their shining prison on its shelf.  
They were indifferent. All the other eyes  
Were turned towards me. Somewhere in myself  
Pride, like a goldfish, flashed a sudden fin.

**Edward Lucie-Smith**