

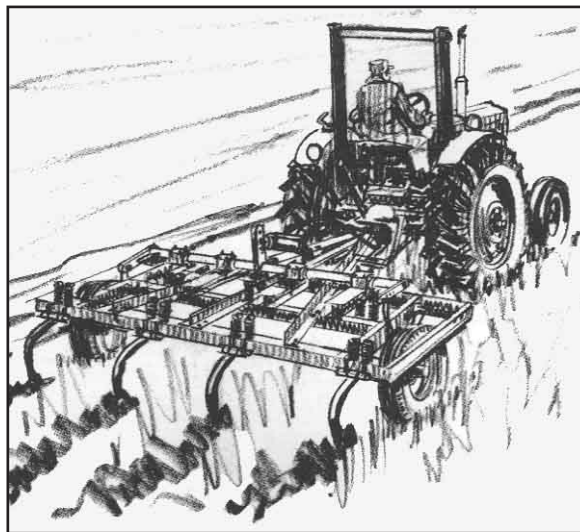
Plowing Through Ashes

After frost, grain-sorghum stubble
yellow as wheat
hid pairs of pheasants
scattered on the plains.
Seven, eight times a season
we searched the rows,
shotguns stiff, dogs sniffing ahead,
and took our necessary meat.

After the last snow
we torched the stalks,
the orange flames
spreading like a prairie fire,
covering the fields with soot.

March, after the dirt cooled,
my father plowed the charred
earth brown again,
like flipping a reversible jacket
seam by seam.
Unless it rained, he ditched,
for two weeks irrigated,
and in May
he rigged the tractor up,
lowered four worn plows
into the ground
and planted grain.

—Walter McDonald



Discussion and Activities

1. Circle the words you don't understand and look them up in a dictionary.
2. Read the poem aloud, one stanza at a time.
3. Identify the poetic style.
4. What do you know about the poet from reading the poem?
5. Explain what is happening in the first stanza.
6. What does the phrase "took our necessary meat" mean?
7. What time of year is "after frost?"
8. Describe what condition the field would be in "after the last snow."
9. Explain what is happening in the second stanza.
10. Compare and contrast these phrases: "after frost," "after the last snow," "after the dirt cooled."
11. How is plowing "like flipping a reversible jacket seam by seam?"
12. Explain what is happening in the third stanza.
13. What is the poet's purpose for writing this poem?
14. What do you know about farming from reading this poem?
15. Identify any examples of figurative language used in the poem (simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification).
16. Write a prose version of this poem.
17. Draw a picture to illustrate a scene from the poem.

P.A.S.S.

Grade 4: Reading - 1.4a; 2.1; 3.1b,2abd; 4.1b,3ab

Grade 5: Reading - 1.1b,4b; 2.1; 3.2abe,4ad; 4.1b,2c,3bcd

Grade 6: Reading - 1.1b,3a; 2.1; 3.2ac,3ab,4d; 4.2c,3acd

Grade 7: Reading - 1.3bcd; 2.1; 3.2ab,4b; 4.3ac

Grade 8: Reading - 1.3bcd; 2.1; 3.2a,3b,4c; 4.3a