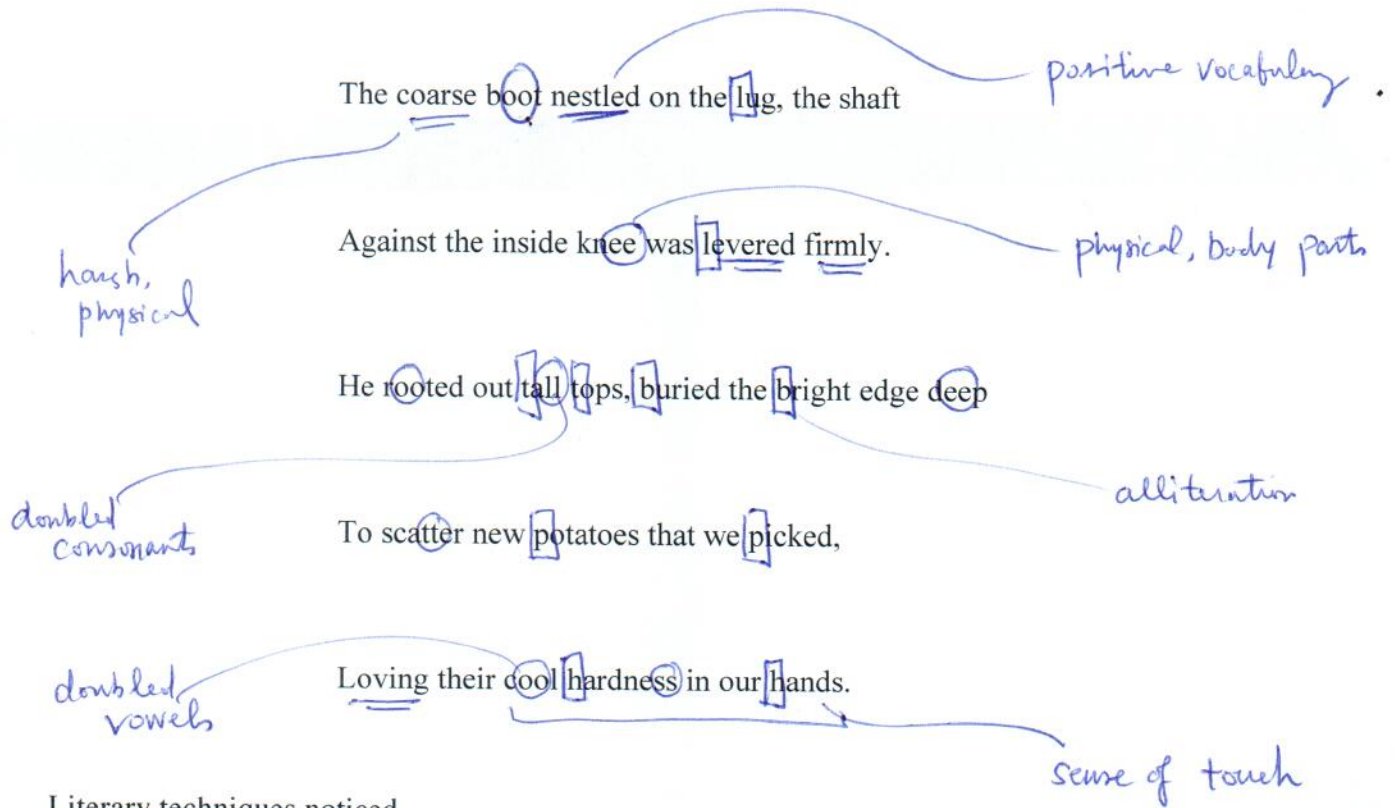


Professor Moy  
Sample Observations & Brainstorm  
(This does not need to be handed in)



#### Literary techniques noticed

- Double vowels: "boot," "knee," "rooted," "deep," and "cool"
- Double consonants: "scatter," "hardness"
- Vocabulary / word choice: "nestled"; "levered"; "firmly"
- Alliteration: "tall tops"; "boot," "buried," "bright"; "hardness" "hands"; "potatoes," "picked"
- Imagery: "cool hardness in our hands" (tactile);
- Body words: boot, (foot), inside knee, hands

#### Meaning-making (Key words & ideas)

Farming vs. Writing poetry

Physical vs. Literary

Work; labor

Harsh vs. pleasant imagery and vocabulary

Literary patterns that are hidden or planted; can be dug out with effort

Professor Moy  
Sample Close Reading Assignment

Farming vs. Poetry: The Physical Parallels between Writing and Digging

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft  
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.  
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep  
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,  
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

In Seamus Heaney's poem "Digging" (1966), the speaker compares his own work of writing poetry to the physical labor of his father and grandfather, who were Irish potato farmers. The fourth stanza is the longest and most expansive stanza in the first half of the poem, and it describes the speaker's father and his work of digging potatoes at Toner's bog. Through the poet's word choice and his use of alliteration, doubled letters, and imagery, these five lines enhance the sense of physicality within words. In other words, his selection of vocabulary and sounds makes it clear that poetry is a tactile experience and that the art of crafting poetry is physical work, not unlike the farming work of his ancestors. For example, the lines are rife with alliteration, as seen in the words "tall tops," "boot," "buried," and "bright," "lug" and levered," "hardness" and "hands," "potatoes" and "picked." The speaker also invokes imagery that deals with the sense of touch and temperature, especially in the lines "cool hardness in our hands," and in his mention of specific body parts. He mentions a "boot," which refers to the farmer's foot, in addition to his father's "inside knee" and hands. Looking at the poem, a reader can also identify doubled vowels and doubled consonants within many words, such as "boot," "knee," "rooted," "deep," "cool," "scatter," and "hardness." This makes a reader pay attention to the physical makeup of each word down to the level of the letter.

In terms of content, Heaney mixes the vocabulary of roughness with cozy or intimate words. Ultimately, he bridges otherwise harsh physical sensations with pleasant emotions, which overcome any feelings of discomfort. The “boot” is “coarse,” but it is “nestled” against something, like the “snug” pen in Stanza 1. The otherwise sharp “shaft” is “levered firmly,” giving a sensation of security and strength. Overall, although the father’s work in this stanza is physical and slightly violent, with the father “root[ing] out” old weeds and thrashing with a spade, this is offset by the pleasant alliterations we hear throughout the stanza. Overall, the rough physical work described gives way to positive description, which we can see in the sense of “loving” the potatoes’ “cool hardness” in line 5. Tactile sensations and the pleasure we derive from description win the day by the end of these lines.

Reading this stanza, we witness how the speaker deftly wields his pen and conjures up physical sounds, much like his father wielded a spade to “root out,” “bury,” and “scatter” crops. Both men use their tools to do *physical* work in similar ways, though they each do so in the context of a different calling. Finally, because the poem is so richly “scattered” with literary techniques, Heaney creates a poem that can invite yet another generation of “digging,” inviting readers to excavate the nuggets of sound and meaning that he planted deep within his lines. In this sense, the family tradition of physically working with one’s hands lives on.