

***Cuttings* Poem Assignment**

Mr. Platt

AP Language and Composition

Read and re-read the following poem. Then, annotate the poem as thoroughly as you can. Finally, answer the questions that follow on a separate sheet of paper (typed, please).

Cuttings

Theodore Roethke (1908-1963)

I

Sticks-in-a-drowse droop over sugary loam,
Their intricate stem-fur dries;
But still the delicate slips keep coaxing up water;
The small cells bulge;

One nub of growth
Nudges a sand-crumble loose,
Pokes through a musty sheath
Its pale tendrilous horn.

II

This urge, wrestle, resurrection of dry sticks,
Cut stems struggling to put down feet,
What saint strained so much,
Rose on such lopped limbs to new life?

I can hear, underground, that sucking and sobbing,
In my veins, in my bones I feel it,--
The small waters seeping upward,
The tight grains parting at last.
When sprouts break out,
Slippery as fish,
I quail, lean to beginnings, sheath-wet.

Questions:

1. What do you think the poet means in line 1 by calling the loam "sugary"? What does he mean by the "stem-fur" of the cutting? In line 7, why does he set "musty sheath" in contrast with "pale tendrilous horn" in line 8? What is the deeper significance of "musty" and "tendrilous"?
2. What is the relation of the first "Cuttings" poem to the second? Would it be fair to say that the first is primarily concerned with providing a vivid description of the cuttings, whereas the second tends to relate the vegetable world to the human world? Point out some of the terms that apply literally to human beings but only by analogy to the cuttings.
3. Can you justify the poet's comparison of a cutting to a saint? The suggestion is that the saint has been martyred or at least mutilated for his faith, and do has to rise on "lopped limbs." What is the new lie to which the cuttings, that now look so much like "dry sticks" aspire?

4. In the last line of Part II, why does the speaker say "I quail"? Why should he experience an awe that amounts to fear in the presence of the cuttings? What does he mean by "lean to beginnings"? Finally, why is "sheath-wet" a powerful word on which to conclude the poem? How does it apply literally to the cuttings?