

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Poetry

## Day 2

### Contemporary Poetry II

*Read pages 1341-1343 and answer the following questions.*

The Gift by Lee

1. Key Ideas & Details
  - a. What does the father do as he removes the boy's splinter?
  
2. Analyze: How does the poem itself mirror this detail?
  
  
2. Key Ideas & Details
  - a. How does the boy view the splinter when it is set in his hand?
  
  
  - b. Infer: Why does the grown speaker refer to the splinter as "Little Assassin" and "Ore Going Deep for My Heart"?
  
  
3. Interpret: What makes the memory of the splinter meaningful for the speaker?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- a. What do each of these poems suggest about the connections between small events and larger ones?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Li-Young Lee

Author of "The Gift"

(b. 1957)

Li-Young Lee was born in Indonesia after his parents were exiled from China. Indonesia proved equally unwelcoming to Lee's father—who was both Christian and pro-Western—and he was imprisoned for nineteen months. After his release, the family moved first to Hong Kong, and then traveled through Macau and Japan. Finally, in 1964, Lee and his family moved to the United States.

**Landing in America** After a childhood of constant motion, Lee adjusted to a calm life in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As an 11-year-old boy, he met a young woman who would later become his wife and the inspiration for many of his poems. Although Lee's transition to life in the United States was smooth, he still says that he is unable to decide if he should consider himself Chinese, Chinese-American, Asian-American, or American. The search for identity is a recurring theme throughout his work.

Although his father often read poetry aloud, Lee did not begin writing poetry until he was a student at the University of Pittsburgh. After further studies in Arizona and New York, Lee settled in Chicago, where he continues to live and work as a full-time poet. Over the years he has published a number of poetry collections and other works.

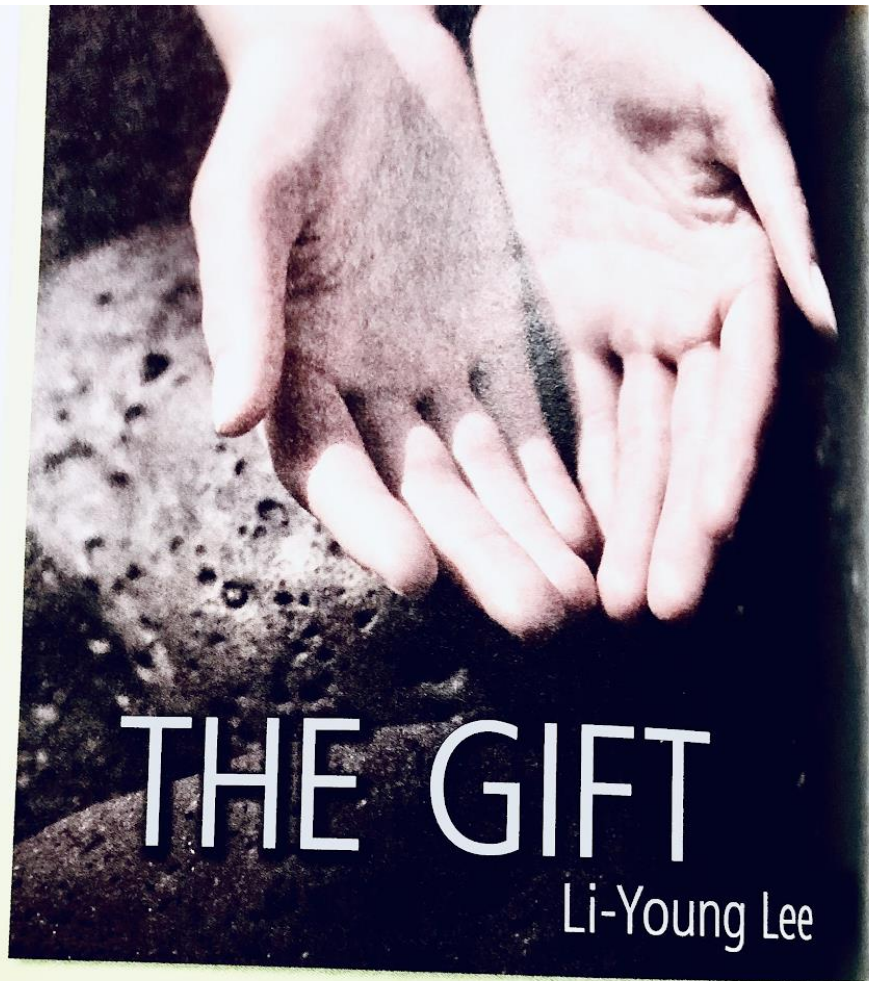
**Story-Poems** Lee's poems are known for their meandering, free-verse style and for the complex web of memories they present. Many of his "story-poems" focus on his childhood experiences as an immigrant and the son of exiles, often recalling, with affection, the strength and gentleness of his father. Influenced by both the Bible and classic Chinese poets, Lee's works have a silent, reverent quality that gives even his most personal subject matter a universal appeal. His many awards include a Lannan Literary Award, a Whiting Writer's Award, three Pushcart Prizes, and a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship.

"The knowledge that it takes to write a poem gets burnt up in the writing of the poem."



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_



**Interpreting**

What central image is presented in the first line of the poem?

To pull the metal splinter from my palm  
my father recited a story in a low voice.  
I watched his lovely face and not the blade.  
Before the story ended, he'd removed  
5 the iron sliver I thought I'd die from.

I can't remember the tale,  
but hear his voice still, a well  
of dark water, a prayer.  
And I recall his hands,  
10 two measures of tenderness  
he laid against my face,  
the flames of discipline  
he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

15 you would have thought you saw a man  
 planting something in a boy's palm,  
 a silver tear, a tiny flame.  
 Had you followed that boy  
 you would have arrived here,  
 20 where I bend over my wife's right hand.  
 Look how I shave her thumbnail down  
 so carefully she feels no pain.  
 Watch as I lift the splinter out.  
 I was seven when my father  
 25 took my hand like this,  
 and I did not hold that **shard**  
 between my fingers and think,  
*Metal that will bury me,*  
 christen it Little Assassin,  
 30 Ore Going Deep for My Heart.  
 And I did not lift up my wound and cry,  
*Death visited here!*  
 I did what a child does  
 when he's given something to keep.  
 35 I kissed my father.

**Vocabulary**

**shard** (shārd) *n.* a sharp fragment of glass or metal

**Critical Reading**



1. **Key Ideas and Details (a)** What does the father do as he removes the boy's splinter? **(b) Analyze:** How does the poem itself mirror this detail?
2. **Key Ideas and Details (a)** How does the boy view the splinter when it is set in his hand? **(b) Infer:** Why does the grown speaker refer to the splinter as "Little Assassin" and "Ore Going Deep for My Heart"? **(c) Interpret:** What makes the memory of the splinter meaningful for the speaker?
3. **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas** What do each of these poems suggest about the connections between small events and larger meanings? In your response, use at least two of these Essential Question words: *transform, vision, identity, ambiguity, landscape.* [Connecting to the Essential Question: *How does literature shape or reflect society?*]

