Poetry Packet A:
Selections for Week 11

Those Winter Sundays
by Robert Hayden

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

When All the Others Were Away at Mass

by Seamus Heaney

When all the others were away at Mass
I was all hers as we peeled potatoes.
They broke the silence, let fall one by one
Like solder weeping off the soldering iron:
Cold comforts set between us, things to share
Gleaming in a bucket of clean water.
And again let fall. Little pleasant splashes
From each other's work would bring us to our senses.

So while the parish priest at her bedside
Went hammer and tongs at the prayers for the dying
And some were responding and some crying
I remembered her head bent towards my head,
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives—
Never closer the whole rest of our lives.

Blackberries

by Yusef Komunyakaa

They left my hands like a printer's
Or thief's before a police blotter
& pulled me into early morning's
Terrestrial sweetness, so thick
The damp ground was consecrated
Where they fell among a garland of thorns.
Although I could smell old lime-covered
History, at ten I'd still hold out my hands
& berries fell into them. Eating from one
& filling a half gallon with the other,
I ate the mythology & dreamt
Of pies & cobbler, almost
Needful as forgiveness. My bird dog Spot
Eyed blue jays & thrashers. The mud frogs
In rich blackness, hid from daylight.
An hour later, beside City Limits Road
I balanced a gleaming can in each hand,
Limboed between worlds, repeating one dollar.

The big blue car made me sweat.
Wintertime crawled out of the windows.
When I leaned closer I saw the boy
& girl my age, in the wide back seat
Smirking, & it was then I remembered my fingers
Burning with thorns among berries too ripe to touch.

Last Look

by Sharon Olds

In the last minute of our marriage, I looked into
his eyes. All that day until then, I had been
comforting him, for the shock he was in
at his pain — the act of leaving me
took him back, to his own early
losses. But now it was time to go beyond
comfort, to part. And his eyes seemed to me,
still, like the first ocean, wherein
the blue-green algae came into their early
language, his sea-wide iris still
essential, for me, with the depths in which
our firstborn, and then our second, had turned,
on the sides of their tongues the taste buds for the moon-bland
nectar of our milk — *our* milk. In his gaze,
rooms of the dead; halls of loss, fog-
emerald; driven, dirty-rice snow:
he was in there somewhere, I looked for him,
and he gave me the gift, he let me in,
knowing he would never once, in this world or in
any other, have to do it again,
and I saw him, not as he really was, I was
still without the strength of anger, but I
saw him see me, even now
that dropping down into trust's affection
in his gaze, and I held it, some seconds, quiet,
and I said, Good-bye, and he said, Good-bye,
and I closed my eyes, and rose up out of the
passenger seat in a spiral like someone

coming up out of a car gone off a
bridge into deep water. And two and
three Septembers later, and even
the September after that, that September in New York,
I was glad I had looked at him. And when I
told a friend how glad I'd been,
she said, *Maybe it's like with the families*
of the dead, even the families of those
who died in the Towers — that need to see
the body, no longer inhabited
by what made them the one we loved — somehow
it helps to say good-bye to the actual,
And I saw, again, how blessed my life has been,
first, to have been able to love,
then, to have the parting now behind me,
and not to have lost him when the kids were young,
and the kids now not at all to have lost him,
and not to have lost him when he loved me, and not to have
lost someone who could have loved me for life.