**Poem at Thirty-Nine by Alice Walker**

How I miss my father.

I wish he had not been

so tired

when I was

born.

|  |
| --- |
| Why was he so tired? What does she regret?  Comment on the structure of this stanza. |

Writing deposit slips and checks

I think of him.

He taught me how.

This is the form,

he must have said:

the way it is done.

I learned to see

bits of paper

as a way

to escape

the life he knew

and even in high school

had a savings

account.

|  |
| --- |
| Explore the semantic field of money and paper here. Why does she focus so much on this?  Comment on her desire to “escape the life he knew”. |

He taught me

that telling the truth

did not always mean

a beating;

though many of my truths

must have grieved him

before the end.

|  |
| --- |
| What do we learn here about her father, and the relationship between the two of them as she grew up?  What is she telling us here about the importance of truth? |

How I miss my father!

He cooked like a person

dancing

in a yoga meditation

and craved the voluptuous

sharing

of good food.

|  |
| --- |
| Here she repeats the opening line. How is it different? Why?  The language in this stanza is quite different from the language earlier on. Explore some of the images she uses. What impression does she create of her father here? |

Now I look and cook just like him:

my brain light;

tossing this and that

into the pot;

seasoning none of my life

the same way twice; happy to feed

whoever strays my way.

|  |
| --- |
| Here she explores how much he has influenced her cooking, but she also uses food as a metaphor. Explore this. |

He would have grown

to admire

the woman I've become:

cooking, writing, chopping wood,

staring into the fire.

|  |
| --- |
| Although it is a poem about grief, the ending is positive and quite uplifting. Explore the verbs Walker has used to describe how she lives her life. |