The Lanyard **by Billy Collins**

The other day I was ricocheting slowly  
off the blue walls of this room,  
moving as if underwater from typewriter to piano,  
from bookshelf to an envelope lying on the floor,  
when I found myself in the L section of the dictionary  
where my eyes fell upon the word lanyard.

No cookie nibbled by a French novelist  
could send one into the past more suddenly—  
a past where I sat at a workbench at a camp  
by a deep Adirondack lake  
learning how to braid long thin plastic strips  
into a lanyard, a gift for my mother.

I had never seen anyone use a lanyard  
or wear one, if that’s what you did with them,  
but that did not keep me from crossing  
strand over strand again and again  
until I had made a boxy  
red and white lanyard for my mother.

She gave me life and milk from her breasts,  
and I gave her a lanyard.  
She nursed me in many a sick room,  
lifted spoons of medicine to my lips,  
laid cold face-cloths on my forehead,  
and then led me out into the airy light

and taught me to walk and swim,  
and I, in turn, presented her with a lanyard.  
Here are thousands of meals, she said,  
and here is clothing and a good education.  
And here is your lanyard, I replied,  
which I made with a little help from a counselor.

Here is a breathing body and a beating heart,  
strong legs, bones and teeth,  
and two clear eyes to read the world, she whispered,  
and here, I said, is the lanyard I made at camp.  
And here, I wish to say to her now,  
is a smaller gift—not the worn truth

that you can never repay your mother,  
but the rueful admission that when she took  
the two-tone lanyard from my hand,  
I was as sure as a boy could be

that this useless, worthless thing I wove  
out of boredom would be enough to make us even.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Provide an example of a simile.

2 What is the mood of the poem?

3. What is the story of the poem?

4. Using your inference skills, what type of relationship do you believe the mother and son have? Explain with specific lines for support.

### The Revenant by Billy Collins

I am the dog you put to sleep,  
as you like to call the needle of oblivion,  
come back to tell you this simple thing:  
I never liked you--not one bit.

When I licked your face,  
I thought of biting off your nose.  
When I watched you toweling yourself dry,  
I wanted to leap and unman you with a snap.

I resented the way you moved,  
your lack of animal grace,  
the way you would sit in a chair to eat,  
a napkin on your lap, knife in your hand.

I would have run away,   
but I was too weak, a trick you taught me  
while I was learning to sit and heel,  
and--greatest of insults--shake hands without a hand.

I admit the sight of the leash  
would excite me  
but only because it meant I was about   
to smell things you had never touched.

You do not want to believe this,  
but I have no reason to lie.  
I hated the car, the rubber toys,  
disliked your friends and, worse, your relatives.

The jingling of my tags drove me mad.  
You always scratched me in the wrong place.  
All I ever wanted from you  
was food and fresh water in my metal bowls.

While you slept, I watched you breathe  
as the moon rose in the sky.  
It took all of my strength  
not to raise my head and howl.

Now I am free of the collar,  
the yellow raincoat, monogrammed sweater,  
the absurdity of your lawn,  
and that is all you need to know about this place

except what you already supposed  
and are glad it did not happen sooner--

that everyone here can read and write,  
the dogs in poetry, the cats and the others in prose.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Paraphrase the poem.

2. What do you think the poem is attempting to do? Educate the reader, create nostalgia , or fear, evoke a mood, etc? Is the poet effective?

3. Who is the speaker? What kind of person is the speaker? Is this clear?

4. Can you identify the author’s intent/purpose? You may also describe this as the theme or “message” of the poem.

5. Discuss the imagery of the poem. What kinds of imagery are used?

6. Point out examples of metaphor, simile, personification, or any other literary device and explain their significance and/ or appropriateness. Also point out significant examples of sound repetition and explain their function.