

## Thinking of Work

James Shea

A brief storm  
blew the earth clean.

There was much  
to do: sun to put up,  
5 clouds to put out,  
blue to install,  
limbs to remove,  
grass to implant.

(The grass failed.  
10 We ordered new grass.)

A limb cracked  
in half in the short storm,  
short with its feeling.

We saw its innards,  
15 all the hollow places.

Something flew out of  
the window and then  
the window flew out of the window.

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## **Suggested Questions and Answers**

1. What is the poem about?
2. In Stanza 1, the storm is described as “brief”. How do the length of the lines and word choice bring out the brevity of the storm?
3. How does the speaker emphasise that there was “much to do” after the storm?
4. What is the follow-up work after the storm likened to? Answer with close reference to the nouns and verbs/action words used in the poem.
5. Comment on the repeated use of certain words in the poem. What effect does it achieve?

## Suggested Questions and Answers

1. What is the poem about?

The poem is about what happened and what has to be done after a storm.

2. In Stanza 1, the storm is described as “brief”. How do the length of the lines and word choice bring out the brevity of the storm?

The poem is mainly composed of short lines and words, notably monosyllabic words, which echo with the brevity of the storm.

3. How does the speaker emphasise that there was “much to do” after the storm?

The use of parallel structures, such as “sun to put up” and “clouds to put out”, in close succession creates a sense of repetition, tediousness and urgency, which helps elaborate the idea that there is a list of follow-up work to do.

4. What is the follow-up work after the storm likened to? Answer with close reference to the nouns and verbs/action words used in the poem.

The follow-up work is likened to a surgery or mechanical repair. While the nouns “limbs” and “innards” may refer to the parts and insides of a body/machine, the verbs “install”, “remove”, “implant” and “failed” are associated with the failure of an organ/machine or the work involved in a surgery/repair.

5. Comment on the repeated use of certain words in the poem. What effect does it achieve?

- Some words are used repeatedly in the poem (e.g. “limbs in lines 7 &11, “short” in lines 12 &13, “windows” in lines 17-18). The repeated words often carry multiple meanings that change as the poem progresses. For example:
  - “limbs” may refer to the limbs of a person, a machine or a tree;
  - “short” may vary in meaning from lasting a brief time to being little in length/height and not having enough of something;
  - “window” varies from the actual window pane and frame to an opening/empty space on the wall, and extends to the meaning of the idiomatic expression “flying out of window”, which means disappearing completely.
- Through the repeated use of words with multiple meanings, the poet creates ambiguity and leaves room for readers’ free interpretation. It also helps to achieve a playful tone, a light-hearted mood and a comical effect.