

‘My father thought it bloody  
queer’

Simon Armitage

# Themes

The poem describes an attempt at youthful rebellion. It seems to have worked in terms of upsetting the father, but the speaker is less sure about the success of his gesture. He has gained an earring, but not in the properly approved fashion. Later the speaker seems to agree with his father's point of view. Armitage seems to be playing with the idea that for teenagers being an individual sometimes means behaving in the same way as everyone else.

# Attitudes, Ideas and Feelings

Think about the father's reaction to his son's arrival.

- What did he mean by 'bloody queer'? Even in the 1970s the word was old-fashioned or insulting.
- Why is the father's comment in 3-5 an insult?
- What did the father feel when his son arrived home? Disgust / Disappointment / Despair / Disbelief?
- Why does he say he should have a ring in his nose instead?

# Attitudes, Ideas and Feelings

- What do you think the son felt when:
  - he had his ear pierced
  - he arrived home
  - his ear started oozing pus?
- What do you think the son felt about his father's reaction?
- How might his voice 'break like a tear'?
- Armitage wrote this poem when he was 29 years old. Complete the following chart to find evidence about what the grown-up Armitage felt.

# Attitudes, Ideas and Feelings

<b>Amused by his actions</b>	<i>Armitage makes fun of himself by writing that he was so scared he had to visit a jeweller to be pierced. A real rebel would have done the job himself. Armitage makes fun of the careful and safe way he rebelled.</i>
<b>Ashamed of his cowardice</b>	
<b>Proud of his resolution</b>	
<b>Happy that he has changed</b>	
<b>Sad that he has changed</b>	

# Language, Structure & Form

- What impression do you get from the word 'rolled'?
- Why might having your ear pierced take 'nerve'?
- What do the words 'sore', 'wound' and 'wept' suggest about the result of the piercing?
- How does Armitage make the reader aware that he was afraid of the piercing and that the results were unpleasant?
- Why does the poem begin with the arrival home and not the piercing of the ear? *To focus on the father's reaction / to leave the horror of the piercing until later / because the poem is about a relationship, not the piercing?*

# Language, Structure & Form

- The poem begins with a strong rhythm and a clear, end-stopped, rhyme scheme. How does this affect our impression of the father?
- In stanza 2, only one sentence is used. Why?
- The words in italics at the end of the poem are said to be the speaker's own, but who do they really belong to?

# Language, Structure & Form

- In this poem Armitage uses numerous full rhymes ('queer' and 'ear') and half rhymes ('queer' and 'hair').
  - how many full and half rhymes of 'queer' does he use?
  - how many other full and half rhymes does he use?
  - why does he use so many?
  - do these rhymes have a particular impact on the reader?
  - what do they contribute to the poem?

# Meanings & Responses

## Armitage

- Wants to rebel but doesn't want to upset his father.
- Makes fun of his own feeble act of rebellion and his father's reaction
- He thinks young people should rebel before they get old.
- He believes his father was right to be annoyed.
- He has come to share the same values as his father.