Lisa Parker (b.1971)

*Snapping Beans*

I snapped beans into the silver bowl

that sat on the splintering slats

of the porchswing between my grandma and me.

I was home for the weekend,

5 from school, from the North,

Grandma hummed "What A Friend We Have In Jesus"

as the sun rose, pushing its pink spikes

through the slant of cornstalks,

through the fly-eyed mesh of the screen.

10 We didn't speak until the sun overcame

the feathered tips of the cornfield

and Grandma stopped humming, I could feel

the soft gray of her stare

against the side of my face

15 when she asked, *How's school a-goin'?*

I wanted to tell her about my classes,

the revelations by book and lecture,

as real as any shout of faith

and potent as a swig of strychnine.

20 She reached the leather of her hand

over the bowl and cupped

my quivering chin; the slick smooth of her palm

held my face the way she held tomatoes

under the spigot, careful not to drop them,

25 and I wanted to tell her

about the nights I cried into the familiar

heartsick panels of the quilt she made me,

wishing myself home on the evening star.

I wanted to tell her the evening star was a planet,

30 that my friends wore noserings and wrote poetry

About sex, about alcoholism, about Buddha.

I wanted to tell her how my stomach burned

acidic holes at the thought of speaking in class,

speaking in an accent, speaking out of turn,

35 how I was tearing, splitting myself apart

with the slow-simmering guilt of being happy

despite it all.

I said, *School's fine.*

We snapped beans into the silver bowl between us

40 and when a hickory leaf, still summer green,

skidded onto the porchfront,

Grandma said,

*It's funny how things blow loose like that.*

Directions: Each poetry explication should be approximately one page in your reader’s journal (longer is better than shorter!). It should be labeled by the title of the poem and the number assigned to it. Use these questions as guides in your analysis of the poem, but do not be limited to answer only what is here. Think critically and do not seek merely to “answer the question”; use these questions to develop a better understanding of the elements of poetry.

2. “Snapping Beans”

* Analyze the two characters within the poem and explain how the poet provides details about each one. What role does one fulfill for the other?
* Comment on how the title connects to the meaning of the poem.
* Consider what is spoken in this poem and contrast it with what is unspoken. How does that contribute to your understanding of the poem?