

As you read this poem, be sure you know what the poet is **personifying**. Suppose the poem had no title: would you know what “they” are? What clues would tell you?

**Directions:** Read the following poem, and follow the “Poetry Order of Operations” to analyze the poem. Then, answer the questions that follow.

---

## The Legend of the Paper Plates

John Haines

They trace their ancestry  
back to the forest  
there all the family stood  
proud, bushy and strong.

<sup>5</sup> Until hard times,  
when from fire and drought  
the patriarchs <sup>1</sup>crashed.

the land was taken for taxes,  
the young people cut down  
<sup>10</sup> and sold to the mills.

Their manhood and womanhood  
was crushed, bleached  
with bitter acids  
their fibers dispersed  
<sup>15</sup> as sawdust  
among ten million offspring.

You see them at any picnic,  
at ball games, at home,  
and at state occasions.

<sup>20</sup> They are thin and pliable,  
porous and identical.  
They are made to be thrown away.

### Notes

#### 1. Structure

#### 2. Descriptive Language

#### 3. Sensory Details

#### 4. Mood

#### 5. Tone

#### 6. Author's Purpose OR Theme

---

<sup>1</sup> **Patriarch:** the aged and respected male heads of the families. (The female equivalents would be matriarchs).

## Responding to the Poem

1. Whom does the “they” refer to in stanza 1? Who or what is the “family?”

---

---

2. Who does “them” refer to in line 17?

---

3. Think about the title. A legend is an old story that is usually handed down from generation to generation. Based on the details, both stated and implied from poem, what *is* the legend of paper plates?

---

---

4. What is **personified** as the patriarchs? Why would the patriarchs be the first to fall?

---

---

5. What is **personified** as the young people? On a literal level, what happens to them?

---

---

6. What are the “offspring,” or children, of these young people?

---

---

7. How do the descendants of the family described in the last stanza contrast with the family in stanza 1?

---

---

8. What is the effect of the **personification** in this poem? In other words, how does it make you feel about trees and their fate?

---

---

9. What do you think was the author’s purpose in writing this poem? Do you think he accomplished his purpose? In deciding on the poet’s purpose, you might think about this question: What does John Haines want me to think about each time I see, use, or throw away a paper plate?

---

—

---

—

---

---

---

**Open Response**

**Prompt:** In the two poems, “The Legend of the Paper Plates,” by John Haines and “Throwing a Tree,” by Thomas Hardy, **both poets** use **personification** to bring trees to life by giving them human-like qualities. Think about the way both poems made you feel after reading them. In an open response, answer the following question: What **effect** does the **use of personification** in **both poems** have on the reader?

Give at least two effects that the poems have on the reader, and use examples of personification from both poems to support your answer. Then, explain how the personification from the poems affected the reader.