Questions for “The Writer” by Richard Wilbur

1. What words do you need to look up? What do you discover, realize or better understand when better knowing these words?
2. Do the words fall into any particular category, domain, or are they associated with any particular “world” or profession?
3. Which two words rhyme? Keeping in mind that many, if not most, of the literary devices and figures of speech writers use ultimately end up being devices of comparison, or connection, what might be the comparison or connection between these two rhyming words?
4. Look up the word “figure.” Which definition applies most to this poem? What happens in this poem at the point this word is used?
5. There are at least two, maybe three large or “controlling” metaphors in the poem. What are they? In which parts of the poem do they dominate? Is there a shift in the metaphor/s—why?
6. One of the controlling metaphors in the poem might be thought a cliché. Why is using a cliché appropriate in this poem?
7. Explain the parts of the first metaphor—what are the analogies?
8. Explain the parts of the second metaphor—what are the analogies?
9. Explain the parts of the third metaphor (if you have found three)—what are the analogies?
10. What is the function of the “bloody” imagery in this poem? What does that tell us?
11. How does this bloody imagery affect the speaker in the poem, and if there is not a literal connection, what is implied by this imagery?
12. In what ways is the line “And clearing the sill of the world” “reversed”? What does this reversal suggest?
13. Would you want the parent of this poem to be your parent—are they an example of good parenting? Why, or why not?
14. Could you learn from this parent? Is there advice for future parents here? What?
15. What is the lesson of this poem? Is it enough to be a theme?