

4. Childhood enthusiasm and excitement are conveyed vividly in this poem. Point to language which shows this enthusiasm and comment on how successful it is.
5. Children are often disappointed in life: they ask Santa Claus for many things at Christmas time and rarely receive all their requests. Perhaps this is a learning stage for children, preparing them for the disappointments of life. How does Heaney present the theme of childhood disappointment? Is his picture pessimistic, negative or realistic?

Final thoughts for discussion:

Do you think that Seamus Heaney captures the innocence of childhood successfully? Does it help to speak the words rather than just read them? Why do you think Heaney creates a half-rhyme effect at the end of each line i.e. the consonants are similar but the vowels are not? What is your favourite description in the poem?

The 'Singer'

In the evenings I used to study
at my mother's old sewing-machine,
pressing my feet occasionally
Up and down on the treadle
as though I were going somewhere
I had never been.

Every year at exams, the pressure mounted -
the summer light bent across my pages
like a squinting eye. The children's shouts
echoed the weather of the street,
a car was thunder,
the ticking of a clock was heavy rain...
In the dark I drew the curtains
on young couples stopping in the entry,
heading home. There were nights
I sent the disconnected wheel
spinning madly round and round
till the empty bobbin rattled in its case.

Medbh McGuckian

Medbh McGuckian says:

'...the poem is not so much about studying and doing exams as really about the desire to be creative and somehow being very frustrated in that, because of having to be a woman and having to sit still and the lack of adventure in your life really, the lack of adventure in your head. And so it is a poem about wanting to write. And not really being able to find a way of doing that.'

'...I was able to talk about how I was cut off from the street... there is an intensity and a sadness and a loneliness that I felt that I could capture.'

Suggestions for work on THE 'SINGER' by MEDBH MCGUCKIAN

Reaching an Understanding

TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION

Everyone has hopes, dreams and ambitions. Frequently young people yearn to be something they are not or cannot be. Sometimes young people become frustrated because they feel caught in the trap of conforming to what is expected of them e.g. it is only relatively recently that girls have been encouraged to pursue non-female occupations. Do you have ambitions? Do you feel restricted by a role which is expected for you by parents or teachers? Do you find it difficult to express your feelings? Discuss these issues with the members of your group to explore if there is a common viewpoint.

Points to consider:

1. What is the significance of the title of the poem?
2. Medbh McGuckian was 26 when she wrote this poem about herself at 16. What experiences does she describe?
3. Does the image of the sewing machine provide us with a comforting or frustrating feeling, or both? Explain your thoughts.

Elaine Gaston says:

'-when I start to write a poem quite often I write down what happened, what I felt about it and I write a whole list of different visual images, I think visual images are really important in a poem.'

Suggestions for work on SEASONED by ELAINE GASTON**TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION**

Elaine Gaston's poem is partly about the sense of role reversal she felt as a daughter when she suddenly had to look after her father as he recuperated after an operation - whereas he once tied her laces when she was young, she now finds she has to tie her father's laces. In groups, read the poem and discuss the idea of changing roles within a family. Perhaps some pupils have elderly grandparents, great-aunts or -uncles. How does age and aging change the nature of relationships within families? And what about youth - do any pupils have very young brothers and sisters and if so what effect does this circumstance have on the family unit? As you grow older, does your role within your family change? If so, how and in what ways?

Points to consider:

Why Brownlee Left

Why Brownlee left, and where he went,

Suggestions for work on WHY BROWNLEE LEFT by PAUL MULDOON

TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION

Missing Person!

The class may be divided into groups. Each group is a special investigation team (in the style of the X-Files or Men in Black). The second line of the poem contains the word 'mystery.' Each group must investigate this disappearance. The poem is a sort of scene of crime: what clues and background does it present to the investigators? Each group must work towards compiling a preliminary report for formal presentation to the rest of the class (no solution to the mystery is as yet required).

OR

Read All About It!

Imagine how the incident and the circumstances surrounding the incident might appear in the local newspaper. Discuss possible headlines, layouts, photo possibilities and interviews. Then individual pupils may write their own newspaper report.

Alternatively, groups might dramatise a report on the incident for radio or television.

Points to consider:

1. Consider the title. It offers itself as a solution - but to what questions? Does it give a satisfactory answer?
2. Is the poem set in the immediate present or the recent past? Give reasons for your answer.
3. What is 'a milker' and what is so special about there being a 'slated farmhouse'?
4. Say what it was made Brownlee famous at noon.
5. List the reasons why Brownlee should have been content. Do you find this a reasonable list?
6. Identify the simile that is used at the end of the extract.
7. Is it possible that this simile together with reference to 'gazing into the future' might offer us a solution to the mystery of the disappearance?
8. What makes Brownlee's disappearance so shocking to his neighbours? Do they measure happiness solely in material terms?

Final thoughts for discussion:

Having read between the 'plough-lines' why do you think Brownlee left? What is your opinion of him? Do you respect him or is he just running away?

Seasoned

He cannot bend to tie his shoe.
I stoop to make the knot
that takes me back
to when he carried fully grown men
down stairs in the middle of the night

found them in floods or snowdrifts
hauled them up cliffs on stretchers
pulled them out of sheughs and bogs
all in a day's work

he held mothers' hands in ambulances
gave the kiss of life
in porches, on roadsides
delivered babies in toilets
of country bars long after closing.

At home he bathed us on a Saturday night
bent over the tub, sleeves rolled up
arms covered in suds
told stories of him as a boy
when once he cycled twenty miles to run a race
and won, then cycled twenty home.

His back, a solid Irish oak,
bent, moved, straightened
to each particular need.
Now its knots tell the years
of a thousand people who leant on him
shoulders that carried other people's lives
as well as his own.

He cannot bend to lace his shoe
and I have learned to make the loop.

Elaine Gaston**Elaine Gaston says:**

'-when I start to write a poem quite often I write down what happened, what I felt about it and I write a whole list of different visual images, I think visual images are really important in a poem.'

Suggestions for work on SEASONED by ELAINE GASTON**TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION**

Elaine Gaston's poem is partly about the sense of role reversal she felt as a daughter when she suddenly had to look after her father as he recuperated after an operation - whereas he once tied her laces when she was young, she now finds she has to tie her father's laces. In groups, read the poem and discuss the idea of changing roles within a family. Perhaps some pupils have elderly grandparents, great-aunts or -uncles. How does age and aging change the nature of relationships within families? And what about youth - do any pupils have very young brothers and sisters and if so what effect does this circumstance have on the family unit? As you grow older, does your role within your family change? If so, how and in what ways?

Points to consider:

1. The poet's father was a country doctor or GP. List the evidence from the poem that would support this fact.
2. What key image in the poem does the title link up with? Explore the possible significance of the title?

Anseo ag Staisiun Chaiseal Na gCorr*Do Michael Davitt*

Anseo ag stáisiún Chaiseal na gCorr
d'aimsigh mise m'oiléan rúin

Cathal O Searcaigh says:

'the area is Irish speaking and I was brought up speaking Irish...Irish is the language of my soul.'

'that whole idea of home is a vitally important thing to my work. I only discovered this when I was a teenager and I went off to London. I became acutely aware then of home and became aware that I was in an alien environment... something of not being recognised, of not having a face, of not having a name, of not having a place and I realised that all of these were here.'

'a lot of my poems have become an act of re-possession. Re-possessing tongue and tradition to a large extent.'



2. The poet tends to use imagery associated with angels throughout the poem. Point to some examples of this imagery and comment on its effectiveness.
3. The picture presented in the poem is a visual one, but sounds dominate the first stanza. Why do you think this

Turn Again

There is a map of the city which shows the bridge that was never built.

A map which shows the bridge that collapsed; the streets that never existed.

Ireland's Entry, Elbow Lane, Weigh-House Lane, Back lane, Stone-Cutter's Entry -

Today's plan is already yesterday's - The streets that were there are gone.

And the shape of the jails cannot be shown for security reasons.

The linen backing is falling apart - the Falls Road hangs by a thread

When someone asks me where I live, I remember where I used to live.

Someone asks me for directions, and I think again. I turn into

A side-street try to throw off my shadow, and history is changed.

Ciaran Carson**Ciaran Carson says:**

'-in my young day it was all smoke and smog and mills and factories and work. And that has by and large all gone now.'

'-I love maps and I see maps as being a story because a map won't show you exactly how it is, a map is only schemata of the thing.'

'-You imagine that what you see in a map is how it is. But if it is only a way of explaining things.'

'-the street names come from the fact that an awful lot of the streets in that area came from the Crimean War. You have got Rumania Street, Balaclava Street, Crimea Street. And the streets themselves are like an emblem of the Empire in a way.'

'-behind how a thing is called there is a whole spin with a story behind it and a history and a yarn behind it.'

Suggestions for work on TURN AGAIN by CIARAN CARSON**TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION**

Our past lives have a great influence on our present existence. What we do now affects our future. What we expect to happen or see doesn't always turn out the way we expect. In groups discuss some experiences that you have had showing how you have been influenced by past events.

Consider:

How do maps tell the story of a city?

again?

How could a street name be considered to be an emblem of an individual's life? The perception of a street name can be considered to be an emblem of an individual's life? The perception of a street name can be considered to be an emblem of an individual's life?

Ciaran Carson is successful at describing a street

The Perch

Perch on their water perch hung in the clear Bann River
Near the clay bank in alder dapple and waver,

Perch they called 'grunts', little flood-slubs, runty and ready,
I saw and I see in the river's glorified body

That is passable through, but they're bluntly holding the
pass,
Under the water-roof, over the bottom, adoze

On the current, against it, all muscle and slur
In the finland of perch, the fenland of alder, on air

That is water, on carpets of Bann stream, on hold
In the everything flows and steady go of the world.

Seamus Heaney**Seamus Heaney says:**

'quite often the kind of poem I write is just an attempt to get back.'

'these perch, although they are actually in the river, they are very much in a kind of fifty-five year old memory lake of my own.'

'I think that water is immediately interesting. It's just as an element it is full of life. It is associated with origin, it is bright, it reflects you.'

Suggestions for work on THE PERCH by SEAMUS HEANEY.**TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION**

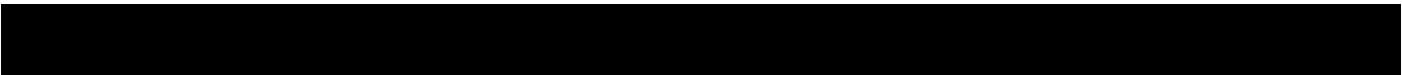
Discuss what the natural world means to you. Are you aware of it? Or do you pass through it not noticing, taking it for granted? *The Perch* is a short lyrical poem where Heaney takes pleasure from nature. In his interview the poet says, 'certain images are like...little frames from a film you forgot the story of but these single frames stay...' What images of the natural world stay with you?

Points to consider:

1. In his interview, Heaney talks about the pleasure of the poem and mentions the puns he allows himself to get away with in the poem. Where are some of these puns? Write a list and try to explain them.
2. What might the presence of so many 'r' sounds in the first few lines of the poem suggest or invoke in a poem about fish in a river?
3. 'I saw and I see...'
4. Why the two tenses? What might this say about writing nature poetry?
5. Consider and write a few lines about the religious significance of: 'the river's glorified body/ That is passable through...'
6. What qualities or human characteristics, even, does the poet admire in the perch?

Final thoughts for discussion:

Read Ted Hughes' poem *Pike* and then compare and contrast these two fishy poems. Say what phrases, words or sounds stood out for you in the poem and, if possible, why.



Seamus Heaney says:

'-There is a brutality and a ruthlessness and a cruelty and casualness and abusiveness about 'slashed and dumped.'-in a sense you are administering the shock to yourself as well as hopefully to the world and the reader that this is what's being done... 'dumped' is a brutal ending and is meant to be.'

'-It is very true to say that work done by writers is quite often an attempt to give solid expression to that which is bothering them...They feel they have got it right if they express the stress.'

Background information:

In the 1950s, Danish turf cutters dug up human bodies from bogland. These were the remains of sacrificial victims who had been killed during the Iron age. PV Glob wrote a book about the discoveries called *The Bog People*. Seamus Heaney read the book and started to write a series of poems about the bog bodies.

Suggestions for work on THE GRAUBALLE MAN by SEAMUS HEANEY**TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION**

'Dulce et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori'. This was the idea challenged by the First World War poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. More recently, Sebastian Faulks and Pat Barker have written memorable novels showing the sacrifice made by ordinary people who were obliged to fight for their country. The idea of humans being sacrificed has been happening since the beginning of time. What do you understand by the word 'sacrifice'? Do you have to make sacrifices in life? Why? Are these sacrifices important or worthwhile? Can you understand why ancient tribes would have felt the need to offer sacrifices to satisfy the Earth Goddess? Should people be prepared to sacrifice their lives to save their country?

Points to consider:

1. Describe the picture which Seamus Heaney presents of the body.
2. Why is the body so well preserved?
3. Why does Heaney present a series of comparisons with familiar objects?
4. Pick out as many similes as you can and explain the reason for the description.
5. Pick out as many metaphors as you can and explain the reason for the description.
6. Why did Heaney first become interested in the Grauballe man?
7. Explain the stanza:

'Who will say 'corpse'
to his vivid cast?
Who will say 'body'
to his opaque repose?'
8. How does Heaney relate this poem to modern times in the last stanza?
9. Heaney seems to combine care and tenderness with brutality and ruthlessness in his description. How does he do this?

Final thoughts for discussion:

Does the description in this poem shock you? Does violence dominate the poem? Pick out words and phrases which interest you most and explain why they do so.

Michael Longley says:

‘It was a friend of mine who was murdered by paramilitaries and I didn’t want to identify him, so I gave him the title ‘The Civil Servant.’

‘-when somebody walks into a home where there is a smell of cooking and where BBC Radio is playing music and takes out a gun.... they are offending the gods really... They are desecrating civilisation. They are disrupting far more than they probably thought about’.

‘I do believe that poetry is about all of those things that happened to people and war is one of the most huge and one