

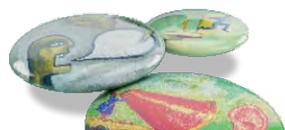
Learner Resource 1

Look at the list of quotes below. In pairs, decide what single word most accurately summarises the subject matter of each quote. You can either select a word from the quote or come up with your own word.

1. "Right down the dam gross-bellied frogs were cocked//On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails [...]// I sickened, turned, and ran. The great slime kings//Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew//That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it." ("Death of a Naturalist")
2. "The staff, like a great whiskey muddler fashioned// in deal wood, was plunged in, the lid fitted.//My mother took first turn, set up rhythms// that slugged and thumped for hours." ("Churning Day")
3. "Or, as we said,//fother, I open//my arms for it//again." ("Fodder")
4. "No treaty//I foresee will salve completely your tracked//And stretchmarked body, the big pain//That leaves you raw, like opened ground, again." ("Act of Union")
5. "Anahorish, soft gradient// of consonant, vowel-meadow..." ("Anahorish")
6. "Out there in Jutland//In the old man-killing parishes//I will feel lost,//Unhappy and at home." ("The Tolland Man")
7. "I am the artful voyeur//of your brain's exposed//and darkened combs,//your muscles' webbing//and all your numbered bones..." ("Punishment")
8. "Murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible//Beheaded girl, outstaring axe//And beatification, outstaring//What had begun to feel like reverence." ("Strange Fruit")
9. "I shouldered a kind of manhood//stopping in to lift the coffins//of dead relations.//They had been laid out//in tainted rooms..." [...] "Now as news comes in//of each neighbourly murder//we pine for ceremony,// customary rhythms..." ("Funeral Rites")
10. "The wintry haw is burning out of season,//crab of the thorn, a small light for small people..." ("The Haw Lantern")
11. "We had driven to that coast//Through flowers and limestone//And there we were, toasting friendship,//Laying down a perfect memory//In the cool of thatch and crockery." ("Oysters")
12. "One morning early I met armoured cars//In convoy, warbling along on powerful tyres,//All camouflaged with broken alder branches..." ("The Toome Road")
13. "Before the kite plunges down into the wood//and this line goes useless//take in your two hands, boys, and feel//the strumming, rooted, long-tailed pull of grief.//You were born fit for it.//Stand in here in front of me//and take the strain." ("A Kite for Michael and Christopher")
14. "No such thing//as innocent//bystanding." ("Mycenae Lookout")
15. "Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,//Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads//Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.//Useless to think you'll park and capture it//More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,//A hurry through which known and strange things pass..." ("Postscript")

All of the following words or phrases have been identified as preoccupations or themes of Heaney's poetry. You might choose to refer to them to prompt you.

Loss of childhood innocence	Personal history and the past	Religion
Names and labels	Family	Love and relationships
Language and the craft of writing	Identity	Myths and folklore
Irish history and culture	Man and the natural world	Irish landscape and tradition
Self-discovery	Farming	
Death	War and conflict	



Learner Resource 1

As a class, compare your findings. Are there any further links you could make regarding the narrative voice, lexical patterns, syntax, phonology or rhyme?

Below are three extracts taken from a speech made by Seamus Heaney when he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. Divide into three groups. Each group is responsible for reading one extract and identifying at least three links back to the list of quotes. Feedback your findings to the class.

You may want to create a wall display that illustrates the recurrent themes and contexts of Heaney's poetry. This could be a display to which you add, as you learn more about Heaney and his work.

In the nineteen forties, when I was the eldest child of an ever-growing family in rural Co. Derry, we crowded together in the three rooms of a traditional thatched farmstead and lived a kind of den-life which was more or less emotionally and intellectually proofed against the outside world. It was an intimate, physical, creaturely existence in which the night sounds of the horse in the stable beyond one bedroom wall mingled with the sounds of adult conversation from the kitchen beyond the other. We took in everything that was going on, of course – rain in the trees, mice on the ceiling, a steam train rumbling along the railway line one field back from the house – but we took it in as if we were in the doze of hibernation. A historical, pre-sexual, in suspension between the archaic and the modern, we were as susceptible and impressionable as the drinking water that stood in a bucket in our scullery: every time a passing train made the earth shake, the surface of that water used to ripple delicately, concentrically, and in utter silence.

The child in the bedroom, listening simultaneously to the domestic idiom of his Irish home and the official idioms of the British broadcaster while picking up from behind both the signals of some other distress, that child was already being schooled for the complexities of his adult predicament, a future where he would have to adjudicate among promptings variously ethical, aesthetical, moral, political, metrical, sceptical, cultural, topical, typical, post-colonial and, taken all together, simply impossible. So it was that I found myself in the mid-nineteen seventies in another small house, this time in Co. Wicklow south of Dublin, with a young family of my own and a slightly less imposing radio set, listening to the rain in the trees and to the news of bombings closer to home – not only those by the Provisional IRA in Belfast but equally atrocious assaults in Dublin by loyalist paramilitaries from the north.

... for years I was bowed to the desk like some monk bowed over his prie-dieu*, some dutiful contemplative pivoting his understanding in an attempt to bear his portion of the weight of the world, knowing himself incapable of heroic virtue or redemptive effect, but constrained by his obedience to his rule to repeat the effort and the posture. Blowing up sparks for meagre heat. Forgetting faith, straining towards good works. Attending insufficiently to the diamond absolutes, among which must be counted the sufficiency of that which is absolutely imagined. Then finally and happily, and not in obedience to the dolorous circumstances of my native place but in despite of them, I straightened up. I began a few years ago to try to make space in my reckoning and imagining for the marvellous as well as for the murderous.

* a low bench used to kneel on while praying

Seamus Heaney, "Crediting Poetry" (Nobel Lecture, December 7, 1995)

