

Learner Resource 2 dismantling the poem

Divide into four groups.

Group one

Group one is responsible for looking at the verbs and verb phrases: flew, [had] seen, [had] tapped, dried out, [had] tied, was, dragged, were, hauled, lift, says, is, sags, ascends, weighs, plunges, take, feel, stand, take.

- Are there any patterns or links that you can find in this list?
- What do you notice about the tense changes here?
- Is there a development or turning point evident in this list of verbs?
- Can you create a narrative from this list? What story do these words tell?

Group two

Group two is responsible for looking at nouns and noun phrases: Sunday afternoon, kite, Sunday, drumhead, chaff, bows of newspaper, tail, lark, string, rope, shoal, friend, human soul, snipe, soul, string, furrow, heavens, kite, wood, line, hands, boys, grief.

- Are there any patterns or links that you can find in this list?
- How many abstract v concrete nouns are there? Why? What does it tell you about the poem?
- Can you construct a narrative from the nouns you have here?

Group three

Group three is responsible for looking at adjectives: tightened, grey, slippy, white, stiff, six-foot, small black, bellied, wet, at anchor, two, strumming, rooted, long-tailed.

- Are there any patterns or links that you find in this list?
- Are there any contrasts that are evident?
- Are there any that seem unusual or out of place? In what way?
- Can you construct a narrative from the adjectives you have here?

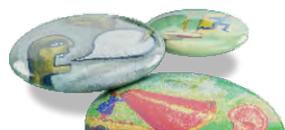
Group four

Group four is responsible for looking at syntax and punctuation.

- There are five verses and each of the first four verses is composed of: verse 1 – simple sentence, verse 2 – complex sentence, verse 3 – complex sentence, verse 4 – complex sentence. In the last verse, there are three sentences: complex, simple and compound. What might this suggest about the nature of the poem?
- The first four sentences are declarative. The last three take the form of the imperative ("take""feel""stand""take"). How would you expect the tone of the poem to change?
- There is the syntactical repetition of "I'd seen it." "I'd tapped it. . ." "I'd tied. . ." in verse two, and then verse three begins with the syntactical repetition of "But now. . ." "and now." What might this suggest about the way in which the poem is structured?

Each group should feedback its analysis to the class. Do the predictions about what this poem might be about differ? If they do, discuss why this might be.

Now read the poem. How accurate were the predictions? Are there any specific words that have altered in meaning in the context of the poem?



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Short writing activity:

Using your analysis, choose one of the sentences below to write a paragraph of an essay on "A Kite for Michael and Christopher":

1. In this poem the innocent activity of kite flying assumes a symbolic value, marking the continuity of the family, from grandfather, to father, to sons. The choice of verbs reveals ...
2. In this poem the innocent activity of kite flying assumes a symbolic value, as the speaker encourages his sons to experience both the pain and the elation of life. The choice of adjectives reveals...
3. In this poem the innocent activity of kite flying assumes a symbolic value, as we see the kite as a tethered soul, temporally flying, yet destined to return to Earth. The choice of nouns reveals...
4. In this poem the innocent activity of kite flying assumes a symbolic value, as it becomes clear that it represents a father's advice to his sons about the tie that they will always have to both their personal and also their political history. The choice of syntax and punctuation reveals ...

You may choose to then share your paragraphs, reading them aloud to the class.

Discuss as a whole group whether there is a single interpretation that seems most convincing, or would you take aspects of each? Or perhaps another reading entirely?

Figuratively speaking:

In "A Kite for Michael and Christopher" (published in 1984), where the kite is destined to "plunge into the woods", the figurative language associated with the kite includes:

- tightened drumhead
- a flitter of blown chaff
- small black lark
- bellied string
- a wet rope hauled upon//to lift a shoal
- soul at anchor
- weighs like a furrow
- long-tailed pull of grief

In Heaney's poem "A Kite for Aibhín" (published in 2010) the figurative language associated with the kite includes:

- White wing
- Long-tailed comet
- Thin-stemmed flower
- A windfall

Can we anticipate the narrative of this poem by looking at the figurative language that Heaney uses?

