

Learner Resource 4

Divide into three groups. Each group should have a copy of "The Haw Lantern", a piece of stimulus material and the same eight questions.

Group one:

- The "haw" referred to in this poem is the berry of the hawthorn bush or tree; a plant that is native to Europe. In May, it has clusters of small, white flowers, and in the Autumn it grows red berries generally about the size of a fingernail. The berries are similar in appearance to the crab apple ("crab of the thorn").
- Hawthorn trees have a great deal of folklore attached to them, and in Irish folklore they are considered to be "faery trees". Tradition dictates that you should not disturb a hawthorn bush out of respect for the fairies, or even hang your clothes on one in case you dislodge the fairies' clothes that are already hanging there.
- According to Irish folklore, hawthorn trees and bushes stand at the threshold to the other world, and pagan altars were situated near them. Even now, hawthorns often are found near holy wells, and those visiting the wells hang offerings on them in the name of good luck.

You may choose to use the following questions to guide your analysis:

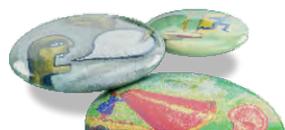
1. Why is the berry burning "out of season"?
2. Who or what are the "small people"?
3. The personification of the haw ("a small light") in the first verse suggests humility ("wanting no more from them but that..." "not having to blind them..."). Why does Heaney create this impression?
4. The tone changes in verse two, (marked by the conjunction "but"). In what way does it change?
5. Why is it relevant to the poem that Diogenes is created from "your breath"?
6. "Your" appears once in the second verse and "you" appears five times. Why?
7. In the final verse the haw is described as having "bonded pith and stone", "pecked-at ripeness", and as a "blood-prick". How have the connotations of the haw altered from that described in the first verse?
8. At the end of the poem, the scrutinizer "moves on". Why?

Group two:

- This poem was originally part of a collection called *The Haw Lantern*, which was published in 1987; a time when the conflicts in Northern Ireland still continued: the year, for example, in which seventy four people were killed during a Remembrance Day Service in Enniskillen.
- In "Crediting Poetry" Heaney talks of the period between 1974 and the ceasefires of August 1994 as a time when "... the dream of justice became subsumed into the callousness of reality, and people settled into a quarter century of life-waste and spirit-waste, of hardening attitudes and narrowing possibilities that were the natural result of political solidarity, traumatic suffering and sheer emotional self-protectiveness."
- In many of his poems, Heaney shows the individual questioning what role to play in a violent society: here, are both society and the individual under scrutiny. He weaves the political troubles in Ireland into a personal reflection on what it means to be an observer in these times.

You may choose to use the following questions to guide your analysis:

1. Why is the berry burning "out of season"?
2. Who or what are the "small people"?
3. The personification of the haw ("a small light") in the first verse suggests humility ("wanting no more from them but that..." "not having to blind them..."). Why does Heaney create this impression?
4. The tone changes in verse two, (marked by the conjunction "but"). In what way does it change?
5. Why is it relevant to the poem that Diogenes is created from "your breath"?
6. "Your" appears once in the second verse and "you" appears five times. Why?



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7. In the final verse the hawk is described as having “bonded pith and stone”, “pecked-at ripeness”, and as a “blood-prick”. How have the connotations of the hawk altered from that described in the first verse?
8. At the end of the poem, the scrutinizer “moves on”. Why?

Group three:

- Diogenes was a controversial Greek philosopher born at the start of the fourth century BC. He rejected all hypocrisy, greed and corruption in the name of virtue, declaring himself to be disinterested in politics, laws and the family, and refusing to fight for his country.
- He is said to have given away everything and to have chosen to live as a sort of urban hermit, living at times in a large, earthenware pot in the centre of Athens. (The Latin name for one species of hermit crab is Diogenes.)
- There are many stories about Diogenes, the most famous of which is that he walked through the streets of Athens during the day time, holding a lit lantern in front of him as he looked for an honest man. He failed to find one.

You may choose to use the following questions to guide your analysis:

1. Why is the berry burning “out of season”?
2. Who or what are the “small people”?
3. The personification of the hawk (“a small light”) in the first verse suggests humility (“wanting no more from them but that...” “not having to blind them...”). Why does Heaney create this impression?
4. The tone changes in verse two, (marked by the conjunction “but”). In what way does it change?
5. Why is it relevant to the poem that Diogenes is created from “your breath”?
6. “Your” appears once in the second verse and “you” appears five times. Why?
7. In the final verse the hawk is described as having “bonded pith and stone”, “pecked-at ripeness”, and as a “blood-prick”. How have the connotations of the hawk altered from that described in the first verse?
8. At the end of the poem, the scrutinizer “moves on”. Why?

All groups should give feedback to the class, and discuss how your interpretations of the poem differ and why.

Now, either in pairs or individually, return to the poem and identify the lexical groups. You might, for example, collect those that relate to the seasons, to nature, to eyes and looking, to light and burning etc.

Once you have done this, go through the words and decide which ones Heaney is using metaphorically or figuratively, and which ones he is using in a literal or empirical sense.

Discuss your findings as a class. Do you agree?

