

**Blackberry Picking**

Late August, given heavy rain and sun  
 for a full week, the blackberries would ripen.  
 At first, just one, a glossy purple clot  
 among others, red, green, hard as a knot.  
 You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet  
 like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it  
 leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for  
 picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger  
 sent us out with milk-cans, pea-tins, jam-pots  
 where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots.  
 Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills  
 we trekked and picked until the cans were full,  
 until the tinkling bottom had been covered  
 with green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned  
 like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered  
 with thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's.  
 We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre.  
 But when the bath was filled we found a fur,  
 A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache.  
 The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush  
 the fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.  
 I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair  
 that all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.  
 Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not.

Seamus Heaney

Seamus Heaney says:

'...I think childhood is, generally speaking, a preparation for disappointment.'

'...what sets poetry part from all other kinds of writing is the fact that it's got a rhythmic unity.'

Suggestions for work on BLACKBERRY PICKING by SEAMUS HEANEY

Reaching an Understanding

**TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION**

Memories of past events provide us with a wide range of thoughts, feelings and emotions. Childhood memories, in particular, provide us with opportunities to laugh, cry and reminisce. Try to recall an occasion from your early childhood which is particularly memorable. Do you actually remember these events or have they been told to you by a member of your family? Share a memory with the members of your group and explore why it is so important to you.

Points to consider:

1. Heaney refers to poetry as when 'human experience comes to life.' How does the experience of blackberry picking come to life in this poem?
2. How is the child's perspective shown in the description of blackberry picking?
3. The power of language is shown particularly well by Seamus Heaney. He makes us hear words as well as see them. Similes, metaphors and onomatopoeic words are woven into the fabric of his verse. Can you find examples of these in Blackberry Picking? Explain the picture that Heaney creates with each example and show how effective it is.

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.

4. How is the idea that the young girl wants to be something which she is not conveyed?
5. Look carefully at the last few lines of the poem and explain your reaction to them:

'There were nights  
I sent the disconnected wheel  
Spinning madly round and round  
Till the empty bobbin rattled in its case'

Final thoughts for discussion:

Did you like this poem? Did it successfully describe the feelings of a 16 year old? Are there any words or phrases which stand out as being particularly memorable? Explain why they appeal to you.

**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?
3. From a close reading of the poem, write a character study of Elaine Gaston's father. Discuss his public and his private personas.
4. Explain in what way 'a thousand people' have leaned on him.
5. Explain the flash-back technique in the poem and in what ways has the poet 'learned to make the loop'?

**Final thoughts for discussion:**

Seamus Heaney's poem *Follower* is about the changing role within a father/son relationship. Groups might compare the two poems and discuss what images and emotions the poems share. What differences are there between the two?

Gary Snyder's poem *Axe Handles* might also be usefully included in such a discussion.

In a poem about visiting his mother in hospital, Robert Sund talks about how we 'Die daily of unexpressed affection.' On a personal, individual level, ask pupils to focus on a member of their own family and think of an appropriate and effective image or series of images that somehow captures how they feel about that person. This might develop into a poem or piece of descriptive writing.

**Why Brownlee Left**

Why Brownlee left, and where he went,  
Is a mystery even now.  
For if a man should have been content  
It was him; two acres of barley,  
One of potatoes, four bullocks,  
A milker, a slated farmhouse.  
He was last seen going out to plough  
On a March morning, bright and early.

By noon Brownlee was famous;  
They had found all abandoned, with  
The last rig unbroken, his pair of black  
Horses, like man and wife,  
Shifting their weight from foot to  
Foot, and gazing into the future.

**Paul Muldoon****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**

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 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  
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he held mothers' hands in ambulances  
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 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  
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 Now its knots tell the years  
 of a thousand people who leant on him  
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**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 Stáisiún Chaiseal na gCorr***Do Michael Davitt*

Anseo ag stáisiún Chaiseal na gCorr  
 d'aimsigh mise m'óileán rúin  
 mo thearmann is mo shanctóir.  
 Anseo braithim i dtiúin  
 le mo chinneáil féin is mo thimpeallacht.  
 Anseo braithim seasmhacht  
 is mé ag feice-il chríocha mo chineáil  
 thart faoi bhun an Eargail  
 mar a bhfuil siad ina gcónaí go ciúin  
 le breis agus trí chéad bliain  
 ar mhínte féaraigh an tsléibhe  
 - Mhín 'a Leá go Mín na Craoibhe.  
 Anseo, foscailte os mo chomhair  
 go díreach mar bheadh leabhar ann  
 tá an taobh tíre seo anois  
 - Dhoire Chonaire go Prochlais.  
 Thíos agus thuas tím na gabháiltais  
 a briseadh as béal an fhiántais.  
 Seo duanaire mo mhuintire;  
 an lámhscríbhinn a shaothraigh siad go teann  
 le dúch a gcuid allais.  
 Anseo tá achán chuibhreann mar bheadh rann ann  
 i mórdhán an mhíntíreachais.  
 Léim anois eipic seo na díograise  
 i gcanúint ghlas na ngabháltas  
 is tuigim nach bhfuilim ach ag comhlíonadh dualgais  
 is mé ag tabhairt dhúshlán an Fholúis  
 go díreach mar a thug mo dhaoine dúshlán an fhiántais  
 le dícheall agus le dúthracht  
 gur thuill siad an duais.  
 Anseo braithim go bhfuil éifeacht i bhfilíocht.  
 Braithim go bhfuil brí agus tábhacht liom mar dhuine  
 is mé ag feidhmiú mar chuisle de chroí mo chine  
 agus as an chinnteacht sin tagann suaimhneas aigne.  
 Ceansaítear mo mhianta, séimhítear mo smaointe,  
 cealaítear contrárthachtaí ar an phointe.

**Cathal O Searcaigh****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.'

**Here at Caiseal na gCorr Station***For Michael Davitt*

Here at Caiseal na gCorr Station  
 I discovered my hidden island,  
 my refuge, my sanctuary.  
 Here I find myself in tune  
 with my fate and environment.  
 Here I feel permanence  
 as I look at the territory of my people  
 around the foot of Errigal  
 where they've settled  
 for more than three hundred years  
 on the grassy mountain pastures  
 from Min a Lea to Min na Craoibhe  
 Here before me, open  
 like a book,  
 is this countryside now  
 from Doire Chonaire to Prochlais.  
 Above and below, I see the holdings  
 farmed from the mouth of wilderness.  
 This is the poem-book of my people,  
 the manuscript they toiled at  
 with the ink of their sweat.  
 Here every enclosed field is like a verse  
 in the great poem of land reclamation.  
 I now read this epic of diligence  
 in the green dialect of the holdings,  
 understand that I'm only fulfilling my duty  
 when I challenge the void  
 exactly as my people challenged the wilderness  
 with diligence and devotion  
 till they earned their prize.  
 Here I feel the worth of poetry.  
 I feel my *raison d'être* and importance as a person  
 as I become the pulse of my people's heart  
 and from this certainty comes peace of mind.  
 My desires are tamed, my thoughts mellow,  
 contradictions are cancelled on the spot.

**Cathal O Searcaigh***Translated by Gabriel Fitzmaurice*

Suggestions for work on **HERE AT CAISEAL NA GCORR STATION** by CATHAL O SEARCAIGH

### TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION

In certain countries, under strict, authoritarian governments and regimes writers have often been persecuted, locked-up or forced into exile. In groups do some research and find examples of places where writers have suffered such ill-treatment. Discuss why writers in particular should find themselves targeted in such a way. Looking at this poem, what spirit reigns in the place that Cathal O Searcaigh describes? Is this 'territory' similar to or different from those places you unearthed in your research?

OR

Do you possess a 'sense of place,' a geography of the heart? If so, describe it and say what special qualities it has for you, why it is so important to you.

#### Points to consider:

1. In your own words write a description of the countryside or landscape depicted in the poem.
2. What does the poet say he has discovered at Caiseal na gCorr?
3. What is a refuge? What is a sanctuary?
4. Why should the poet feel justified in feeling 'permanence' in this place? What does he mean by this 'permanence'?
5. What do you think the poet's people have been doing in this 'territory'?
6. What words and images show us that by accepting his 'fate' as a poet, Cathal O Searcaigh feels he has not broken any tradition but has rather stayed very much 'in tune' with his 'environment'?
7. What do you think the poet means when he says: '...I challenge the void/exactly as my people challenged the wilderness...'
8. Look at the last line. By becoming a poet what 'contradictions' might he have feared?
9. How is he 'the pulse of his people'?
10. Look up the word 'reclamation' in the dictionary. Find its meaning. Then find out its etymology (check the dictionary). In what way does this word then become very appropriate to this poem?

#### Final thoughts for discussion:

Read Seamus Heaney's poems *DIGGING* and *FOLLOWER* and consider how O Searcaigh's poem might share certain ideas and features with these two poems. Consider the poems you have studied as regards a 'sense of place' and write about what they have revealed to you about the poet's place in society. How important a part do you think poets play in society?

#### 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?
3. From a close reading of the poem, write a character study of Elaine Gaston's father. Discuss his public and his private personas.
4. Explain in what way 'a thousand people' have leaned on him.
5. Explain the flash-back technique in the poem and in what ways has the poet 'learned to make the loop'?

#### Final thoughts for discussion:

Seamus Heaney's poem *Follower* is about the changing role within a father/son relationship. Groups might compare the two poems and discuss what images and emotions the poems share. What differences are there between the two?

Gary Snyder's poem *Axe Handles* might also be usefully included in such a discussion.

In a poem about visiting his mother in hospital, Robert Sund talks about how we 'Die daily of unexpressed affection.' On a personal, individual level, ask pupils to focus on a member of their own family and think of an appropriate and effective image or series of images that somehow captures how they feel about that person. This might develop into a poem or piece of descriptive writing.

### Paradise Fatigue

Above the falling blade of the Hatchet Field a cloud  
shrouds, a star  
hums, a moon pendulums, a merlin scythes the air  
with angled wings, a wind sings in the cat's cradle  
of a transmission aerial.

Below Black Mountain a kneeling cherub with  
a fractured wing  
swings from the jib of a crank-and-ratchet crane  
in a monumental sculptor's yard strewn  
with half-engraved memorials.

Under the sign of two beaten angels hanging by a  
brazen wing  
at the place where six roads cross  
a stolen Zephyr brakes spilling  
strings of Angel Dust.

Elsewhere the wings of a broadsheet fold round the  
globe of a hazard  
lamp alternating in circuits of blips and quarks  
a quirk of light in the spaces  
between the words.

### Eilish Martin

#### Eilish Martin says:

'in the poem I am revisiting many of the places that I would have been familiar with in my childhood.'

'for me poetry is a journey and through that journey I discover a great deal about myself. And it is in the process of writing that I am able to find out various things that I believe in or don't believe in. So for me writing is very much a journey in thought.'

'it is a compulsion - it's something that you really don't have any control over. If you want to write you have to write...For me a lot of poetry is a journey and through that journey I discover a great deal about myself. And it is in the process of writing that I am able to find out various things that I believe in or don't believe in. So for me writing is very much a journey in thought.'

#### Suggestions for work on PARADISE FATIGUE by EILISH MARTIN

#### TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION

We often pay very little attention to the area or town in which we live. With the other members of your group discuss the landmarks or central features of your town. Has the town changed in the last twenty years? Ask your parents/ adult friends if there are any major changes in the town in recent years. Perhaps you might like to write a description of your town.

#### Points to consider:

1. How does the poet describe a journey through Belfast?

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 is so?
4. What do you understand by the title of the poem?
5. Look closely at the last stanza. What do you think it means? Do you think that this stanza reflects the poet's optimistic view of life?

**Final thoughts for discussion:**

Do you get the feeling that the poet has a great affection for her city? She seems to want to share her picture by giving such a detailed account. Pick out words and phrases that have a significance for you and comment on why you like them.

**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.

**Points to consider:**

1. How do maps tell the story of a city?
2. Maps are supposed to explain things, give you a sense of where you are. Is this the way the poet sees the map of the city in Turn Again?
3. How could this poem be considered to be an extended metaphor explaining an individual's confusion in life?
4. The poet creates a landscape which has nightmarish aspects. Can you select and explain phrases and words which create this effect?

**Final thoughts for discussion:**

Do you think that Ciaran Carson is successful in describing a troubled place dominated by its past? Explain your reasons for liking or disliking this poem.

**Carrigskeewaun:***For Penny and David Cabot*

## The Mountain

This is ravens' territory, skulls, bones,  
 The marrow of these boulders supervised  
 From the upper air: I stand alone here  
 And seem to gather children about me,  
 A collection of picnic things, my voice  
 Filling the district as I call their names.

## The Path

With my first step I dislodge the mallards  
 Whose necks strain over the bog to where  
 Kittiwakes scrape the waves: then, the circle  
 Widening, lapwings, curlews, snipe until  
 I am left with only one swan to nudge  
 To the far side of its gradual disdain.

## The Strand

I discover, remaindered from yesterday,  
 Cattle tracks, a sanderling's tiny trail,  
 The footprints of the children and my own  
 Linking the dunes to the water's edge,  
 Reducing to sand the dry shells, the toe  
 And fingernail parings of the sea.

## The Wall

I join all the men who have squatted here  
 This lichened side of the dry-stone wall  
 And notice how smoke from our turf fire  
 Recalls in the cool air above the lake  
 Steam from a kettle, a tablecloth and  
 A table she might have already set.

## The Lake

Though it will duplicate at any time  
 The sheep and cattle that wander there,  
 For a few minutes every evening  
 Its surface seems tilted to receive  
 The sun perfectly, the mare and her foal,  
 The heron, all such special visitors.

**Michael Longley****Michael Longley says:**

'-Carrigskeewaun is unbelievably beautiful - it's the most magical place in the world for me. It's the Garden of Eden and I often think about it. If I am depressed I go for a walk in my mind up the path to the cottage around the little ruined out houses and I stand taking in the view even though I am in Belfast or London or New York.'

'-The whole thing is an exploration and I think the emerging form of the poem is like a compass that an explorer might use when he is exploring unknown territory...the poet in the act of writing a poem should be discovering at the back of his or her mind things that he doesn't know about...it should be a surprise...if the poet doesn't surprise himself he is not going to surprise anybody else.'

'-The patterns of poetry are a way of finding, echoing mirrored shapes in patterns in the world around us.'

'-The major task for the poet is to find fresh rhythms. To make fresh music and not to repeat himself or anybody else for that matter, and the only way one is going to find new vital rhythms is being vital and alive and alert and responsive oneself. To live life with all of one's pores open.'

### Suggestions for work on CARRIGSKEEWAUN by MICHAEL LONGLEY

#### TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION

The townland of Carrigskeewaun is very dear to the poet. See if you can geographically locate the area on a map. What other information can you find about the coast of County Mayo? Do some research and, in groups, share your findings. Nominate a place or area that you would describe as being 'dear' to you. Describe the place and explain why it has made such an impression on you.

#### Points to consider:

1. In his interview, Michael Longley talks about how the poem is divided into headed sections and how each section explores distance and closeness. How is this evident in The Mountain? Who is doing the 'supervising' in this segment?
2. Describe in your own words what happens in The Path. In what way is the swan different from the rest of the birds? How does the poet feel about this?
3. Investigate the word 'remaindered' in The Strand. What world of work does it belong to? In a way the poet could be said to be 'reading' the beach. What other word or image from the book trade does 'remaindered' link up with in this section?
4. The Wall: what is a 'dry-stone wall'? What is the poet momentarily doing in the poem? As he hunkers there what thoughts or images are conjured up in his mind? How might this relate back to what was said in question one?
5. How can The Lake 'duplicate at any time...'? How can the poet?

#### Final thoughts for discussion:

These sections are like poetic postcards or snap-shots. Have a rummage in your own memory and see if you can find a memory, a moment where you came in contact with the wild or natural world. Then preserve the memory in your own poetic snap-shot.

On a personal, individual level, ask pupils to focus on a member of their own family and think of an appropriate and effective image or series of images that somehow captures how they feel about that person. This might develop into a poem or piece of descriptive writing.

### 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.

**Belfast Confetti**

Suddenly as the riot squad moved in, it was raining  
 exclamation marks,  
 Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. A fount of broken type. And the  
 explosion.  
 Itself - an askerisk on the map. This hyphenated line, a burst  
 of rapid fire...  
 I was trying to complete a sentence in my head but it kept  
 stuttering,  
 All the alleyways and side streets blocked with stops and  
 colons.

I know this labyrinth so well - Balaclava, Raglan, Inkerman,  
 Odessa Street -  
 Why can't I escape? Every move is punctuated. Crimea  
 Street. Dead end again.  
 A Saracen, Kremlin-2 mesh. Makrolon face-shields. Walkie-  
 talkies. What is  
 My name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going? A  
 fusillade of question- marks.

**Ciaran Carson****Ciaran Carson says:**

'-if there was a riot in the shipyard they would assemble the collective nuts and bolts, iron bits for this and that and the other thing... 'For we'll throw some Belfast Confetti on them and see how they will be getting on with that.'-and the accent comes across...'Belfast Confetti' ...it's not nice.'

'-I see those poems as being very much just as if I were an eye on the scene. As if I were alert to the sounds of the time and what was going on at the exact time.'

**Suggestions for work on BELFAST CONFETTI - CIARAN CARSON****TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION**

War has been with us since the beginning of time. People have always discussed, argued, fought over issues which concerned them. The idea of people living in total peace has never existed. Why do people argue, fight? What is it about human nature which makes people struggle for position? Is there such a thing as a totally peaceful society? In groups discuss these ideas to see if there is a common viewpoint.

**Points to consider:**

1. Ciaran Carson states the importance of poetry telling a story. What is the story which he tells in this poem?
  2. What do you understand by the title of the poem? Is the title ironic?
  3. Consider the list of street names. Can you see any significance in their names?
  4. Consider the length of the lines of the poem, the short sentences and the questions. Why do you think Ciaran Carson writes in this style?
  5. How is the craft of creating a poem mirrored in the events of the story of the poem?
4. The Wall: what is a 'dry-stone wall'? What is the poet momentarily doing in the poem? As he hunkers there what thoughts or images are conjured up in his mind? How might this relate back to what was said in question one?
  5. How can The Lake 'duplicate at any time...'? How can the poet?

### The Grauballe Man

As if he had been poured  
in tar, he lies  
on a pillow of turf  
and seems to weep

the black river of himself.  
The grain of his wrists  
is like bog oak,  
the ball of his heel

like a basalt egg.  
His instep has shrunk  
cold as a swan's foot  
or a wet swamp root.

His hips are the ridge  
and purse of a mussel,  
his spine an eel arrested  
under a glisten of mud.

The head lifts,  
the chin is a visor  
raised above the vent  
of his slashed throat

that has tanned and toughened.  
The cured wound  
opens inwards to a dark  
elderberry place.

Who will say 'corpse'  
to his vivid cast?  
Who will say 'body'  
to his opaque repose?

And his rusted hair,  
a mat unlikely  
as a foetus's.  
I first saw his twisted face

in a photograph,  
a head and shoulder  
out of the peat,  
bruised like a forceps baby,

but now he lies  
perfected in my memory,  
down to the red horn  
of his nails,

hung in the scales  
with beauty and atrocity:  
with the Dying Gaul  
too strictly compassed

on his shield,  
with the actual weight  
of each hooded victim,  
slashed and dumped.

Seamus Heaney

**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.

### The Civil Servant from Wreaths

He was preparing an Ulster fry for breakfast  
When someone walked into the kitchen and shot him:  
A bullet entered his mouth and pierced his skull,  
The books he had read, the music he could play.

He lay in his dressing gown and pyjamas  
While they dusted the dresser for fingerprints  
And then shuffled backwards across the garden  
With notebooks, cameras and measuring tapes.

They rolled him up like a red carpet and left  
Only a bullet hole in the cutlery drawer:  
Later his widow took a hammer and chisel  
And removed the black keys from his piano.

### Michael Longley

#### 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 of the most horrible things that happens to millions of people.’

#### Suggestions for work on THE CIVIL SERVANT by MICHAEL LONGLEY

#### TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION

Wilfred Owen, along with the other twentieth century war poets stressed ‘the pity of war’. He emphasised the idea that ordinary human beings became involved in war because of governmental decision making. The ordinary men suffered indignity, degradation and humiliation. The people who survived the first world war were scarred and were haunted by their memories and experiences. Look at *Dulce et Decorum Est* or *The Send-Off* by Wilfred Owen and consider how he expresses the extent of the suffering by the ordinary man.

#### Points to consider:

1. What is the ‘story’ behind the poem?
2. What is the significance of the title of the poem?
3. How does the poet evoke the contrast between the atrocity of the act committed by the murderer and the normality of the routine and pattern of the civil servant’s existence?
4. What effect does the death of the civil servant have on his wife?
5. The poem is presented in the form of an eye-witness account. Consider the tone used by the poet.

#### Final thoughts for discussion:

Do you find the events described in this poem shocking? How would this event be described on the news? In groups conduct an interview with a neighbour of the widow to find out reactions to the event. Write an article for a local newspaper which describes these events.