



READING 3 Evaluate the changes in sound, form, figurative language, graphics, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods. **7** Analyze how the author's patterns of imagery reveal theme, set tone, and create meaning in metaphors, passages, and literary works.

Digging

Poem by Seamus Heaney

The Horses

Poem by Ted Hughes

Meet the Authors

Seamus Heaney born 1939



Many critics consider Seamus Heaney (shā'məs hä'nē) the most important Irish poet since William Butler Yeats. Heaney's poems are characterized by themes and imagery taken from the natural world and rural life. In 1995, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

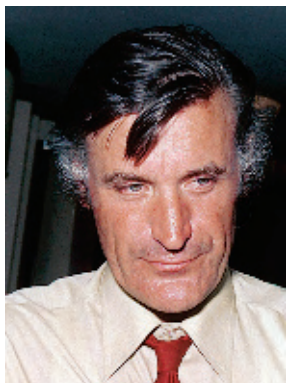
Farmboy Turned Poet Heaney was born to a Catholic farm family in Northern Ireland. In 1957, he won a scholarship to Queen's University in Belfast, where he became interested in the poetry of Robert Frost, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and

Patrick Kavanagh, all of whom wrote about their local surroundings. These poets affirmed for Heaney the validity of his background, and after graduating, he too began writing poetry.

Famous Seamus In 1966, Heaney published his first book, *Death of a Naturalist*, a collection of poems about the experiences of his rural childhood. The book brought Heaney instant acclaim. It opens with "Digging," a poem whose "rhythms and noises" Heaney has said still please him.

Ted Hughes

1930–1998



When Ted Hughes was named England's poet laureate in 1984, it took many people by surprise. Hughes's verse often focused on the savage, predatory aspects of nature, an emphasis some people found disturbing. Although controversial, Hughes ranks as one of Britain's most influential 20th-century poets.

A Yorkshire Lad As a youth, Hughes loved to explore the bleak yet "exultant" moors (areas of high, open land) near his home in Yorkshire. In 1951 he went to Cambridge University, where he published his first poems. Five years later, he met and married the American poet Sylvia Plath.

Contest Winner Plath encouraged Hughes to enter some of his poetry in a contest. Hughes's manuscript was chosen

out of 287 submissions and published in 1957 as *The Hawk in the Rain*. The collection immediately established his reputation as an important new poet. The poems in the book contain compelling descriptions of wild, natural settings and use animals to probe the instinctual, nonrational side of human life.

Tragedy and Recovery Hughes and Plath had a volatile marriage, and in 1962 they separated. In 1963 Plath committed suicide. For nearly three years, Hughes wrote no poetry at all. When he began writing again, however, he was prolific. During his life he published dozens of volumes of poetry and prose and received many literary honors.

Authors Online



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● POETIC FORM: FREE VERSE

The following poems, like most contemporary poems, are written in **free verse**, without regular patterns of rhyme, rhythm, or meter. The lines are not random; they are just organized according to other principles chosen by the poet. Because free verse is unrhymed and unmetered, it can achieve a rhythm closer to that of everyday speech or unvoiced thoughts. In addition, the use of free verse affects the shape of a poem, allowing the poet to mix in shorter lines for effect.

● LITERARY ANALYSIS: IMAGERY

Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes are contemporary poets admired for the richness of their imagery. **Imagery**, as you recall, consists of words and phrases that re-create sensory experiences for the reader. Visual imagery appeals to the sense of sight; auditory imagery appeals to the sense of hearing; tactile, to the sense of touch; olfactory, to the sense of smell; and gustatory, to the sense of taste. A sixth kind of imagery, **kinesthetic**, re-creates the tension felt through muscles, tendons, and joints in the body. The first lines of Seamus Heaney's poem "Digging" contain kinesthetic imagery that describes the sensation of gripping a pen:

*Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.*

Some imagery is uniquely mixed, appealing to one sense while describing another, as in "cold smell of potato mold." This blending is called **synesthesia**. Notice how the imagery in the poems conveys very specific memories.

● READING SKILL: ANALYZE WORD CHOICE

Word choice is important in poetry because the language is so compressed. Poets carefully choose words for their connotations—shades of meaning beyond the basic definitions of the words. For example, in "The Horses," Hughes uses the adjective *evil* to describe the early morning air. By choosing a word with such strong negative connotations, he captures the reader's attention and establishes an ominous mood. The sound of a word also influences a poet's choice, especially when the poet uses sound devices such as rhyme or alliteration. As you read each poem, note which words create the strongest impressions for you.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Why do MEMORIES mean so much?

As time passes, new experiences threaten to crowd out cherished memories. To preserve memories, some people take photographs or shoot video of experiences they don't want to forget. The poets Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes, however, attempt to capture in words both the ordinary and the sublime moments of life.

QUICKWRITE Think about the kinds of experiences that have made a lasting impression on you. Did those experiences involve ordinary events or extraordinary moments? Jot down some of these experiences, and explain why they occupy a special place in your memory



DIGGING

Seamus Heaney

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
5 My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

10 The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked
Loving their cool hardness in our hands. **A**

15 By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
20 Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away

Analyze Visuals ►

What can you tell from the photograph about the work of digging peat?

8 drills: furrows for planting seeds.

10 lug: a widening at the top of a shovel blade to support the foot.

A IMAGERY

Identify **kinesthetic imagery** in lines 6–14.

17–22 Turf, or peat—partially decayed matter found in wet areas called bogs—was cut in blocks called sods and used as fuel in Ireland.



Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

- 25 The cold smell of potato mold, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

- Between my finger and my thumb
30 The squat pen rests. **B**
I'll dig with it.

Language Coach

Word Definitions A word whose sound echoes its meaning is an example of **onomatopoeia**. Which words in line 25 are onomatopoeic? To what senses does the line appeal?

B WORD CHOICE

What connotations may have influenced Heaney to use the word *squat* to describe the pen in line 30? Explain.

Literary Analysis

1. **Summarize** What **memories** does the speaker recall in this poem?
2. **Make Inferences** Describe the speaker's attitude toward his father and grandfather. How does he view himself in relation to them?
3. **Examine Sound Devices** Identify examples of **onomatopoeia** in the poem. How do the sounds of the words suggest the things or actions they describe?



THE HORSES

Ted Hughes

I climbed through woods in the hour-before-dawn dark.
Evil air, a frost-making stillness,

Not a leaf, not a bird—
A world cast in frost. I came out above the wood

5 Where my breath left tortuous statues in the iron light.
But the valleys were draining the darkness

Till the moorline—blackening dregs of the brightening gray—
Halved the sky ahead. And I saw the horses:

Huge in the dense gray—ten together—
10 Megalith-still. They breathed, making no move,

5 **tortuous**: winding or twisting.

7 **moorline**: the horizon at the edge of a moor; **dregs**: small amounts left over.

10 **megalith**: a very large stone of the sort used in various prehistoric formations, such as Stonehenge.

I passed: not one snorted or jerked its head.
Gray silent fragments

Between the streams and the red clouds, hearing curlews,
Hearing the horizons endure.

Consider the connotations of the word *horizons*. What effect is achieved by calling the horses “patient as the horizons” in line 33?



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Comprehension

- 1. Recall** Where and at what time of day does the scene in “The Horses” take place?
- 2. Clarify** How do the horses look to the speaker the first time he sees them? the second time?
- 3. Paraphrase** Restate the meaning of the last line: “Hearing the horizons endure.”

Literary Analysis

- 4. Make Inferences** What is the attitude of the speaker of “The Horses” toward the animals he encounters? What might they represent to him? Support your answer.
- 5. Examine Imagery** In a chart like the one shown, identify the most powerful and immediate images in “Digging” and “The Horses.” What senses do these images appeal to? Explain how the imagery affects the **mood** of each poem.

<i>Poem:</i>	
<i>Image</i>	<i>Sense(s)</i>

- 6. Analyze Word Choice** For each poem, identify three words that seem particularly striking or unusual. What connotations or sounds may have influenced the poet to choose each of these words?
- 7. Analyze Free Verse** How do the line length and the stanza structure affect the rhythm of each poem? Discuss how **repetition** of words is used to unify the poems.
- 8. Evaluate Style** Which of the poems seems more “regional”—tied to a particular place? Give reasons for your choice.

Literary Criticism

- 9. Critical Interpretations** Heaney and Hughes were close friends, and at the memorial service for Hughes, Heaney said, “He was a born poet in as far as his first impulse was to give glory to creation.” What evidence do you see of this in “The Horses”?

*Why do **MEMORIES** mean so much?*

What do these two poems suggest about the purpose and value of memories? Support your answer with details from the poems.