

# REMOTE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

**Name:**

**Class:**

**Teacher:**



*This booklet has been designed to help you learn the poems in the poetry unit at home. Work your way through the activities in the booklet. You can fill these out on the computer or print the booklet off and hand write your answers. On various pages there will be directions to other resources you can find online to help you with your studies. If you do not have access to a computer, please do not worry! The most important things you need to know have been set out for you here.*

## **‘Death of a Naturalist’**

**Seamus Heaney**

## Death of a Naturalist

This session will be based around 'Death of a Naturalist' by Seamus Heaney. Some of the activities will require you to make notes in this booklet or on a different piece of paper. When you begin to annotate the poem, you can do this in your copies of the poetry anthology if you wish. We will go through these poems again in class when you return to address any misconceptions you might have made. If you have any questions, email your teacher who will get back to you as soon as they can.

### Activity #1 – Pre-reading activities



#### MAKE PREDICTIONS

Spend no more than five minutes on this activity. Consider the title of the poem. Predict what big ideas the poem will explore by reading the information below and complete the activities that follow. Write your answers as annotations around the title.

It is often said that this poem is metaphorical. What could the metaphor mean?

What does this mean?

## Death of a Naturalist

1. Using the information provided above, what do you think has happened?
2. The poem is autobiographical and reflective on the poet's childhood. What does this mean?
3. What themes do you think will be included in the poem?



#### SUMMARISE THE INFORMATION

Spend no more than five minutes on this activity. Read the contextual information below and then write down, in full sentences, **FOUR** things you have learnt about *Death of a Naturalist* from the text. As you read, consider whether any of your predictions from the task above have been confirmed as correct. Tick any that have been!

Seamus Heaney was an Irish poet, playwright, translator and lecturer. In 1995, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature and was considered one of the principle contributors to poetry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

He often wrote about themes such as childhood, nature and politics. He was apolitical (non-political) but his poems still contain valuable messages in them. He focused on the beauty and depth of nature. Growing up on a farm, which he was due to inherit, Heaney fell out of love with nature and found a new life in the city. Heaney later became a teacher and lecturer, which might also be explored in the references to the speaker's education.

At the age of 12, he won a scholarship to a Catholic boarding school, and it was there he received news of the death of his younger brother – an incident remembered in many of his poems.

The poem is both a description of Heaney's experience with nature as a boy, and a metaphor for the loss of his childhood innocence, as he looks back at his youthful naivety. He is fascinated by the frogspawn and tadpoles of the flax-damn, but becomes repulsed by a horde of croaking frogs in their maturity. It could also be a poem about change, and a warning to not be so adamant (sure) about things because you could change your mind as you get older. The sudden tearing away from youthful innocence could also be metaphoric of Heaney having to grow up very quickly with the death of his brother, and also potentially because of the violence happening with the IRA in Ireland.

1.

3.

2.

4.

### Activity #2 – Read the poem

Spend no longer than ten minutes on this activity. Read the poem and answer the questions that follow in full sentences. If you need help understanding the poem, try the YouTube link. Do your best to answer the questions without extra help first before you look elsewhere for information: <https://youtu.be/eGbyTXVwQG4> and <https://youtu.be/5elsLpSaOi4>

1 All year the flax-dam festered in the heart  
Of the townland; green and heavy headed  
Flax had rotted there, weighted down by huge sods.  
Daily it sweltered in the punishing sun.  
5 Bubbles gargled delicately, bluebottles  
Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell.  
There were dragonflies, spotted butterflies,  
But best of all was the warm thick slobber  
Of frogspawn that grew like clotted water  
10 In the shade of the banks. Here, every spring  
I would fill jampotfuls of the jellied  
Specks to range on window sills at home,  
On shelves at school, and wait and watch until  
The fattening dots burst, into nimble  
15 Swimming tadpoles. Miss Walls would tell us how  
The daddy frog was called a bullfrog  
And how he croaked and how the mammy frog  
Laid hundreds of little eggs and this was  
Frogspawn. You could tell the weather by frogs too  
20 For they were yellow in the sun and brown  
In rain.

Then one hot day when fields were rank  
With cowdung in the grass the angry frogs  
Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedges  
25 To a coarse croaking that I had not heard  
Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus.  
Right down the dam gross bellied frogs were cocked  
On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped:  
The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat  
30 Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting.  
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.

1) What is happening in this poem? Explain your ideas in no more than four sentences.

2) Why do you think Heaney mentions 'Death' in the title?

3) How is nature presented in the poem?

Activity #3 – Clarifying tricky vocabulary



CLARIFY  
TRICKY  
VOCABULARY

Spend no longer than twenty minutes on this activity. Some of the words from the poem are quite complex. Write the definitions for each word and explain what they mean in the poem's context. Look at the example below to help you. Once you have finished adding your definitions, check the answers in the back of the booklet immediately to avoid any errors and misconceptions. There will be a chance for you to visually represent each word at the end of this activity as well.

An example:

Word	Add the definition	Read the word in context	What does the line mean?
Flax-dam	<i>A place where bundles of flax (a plant) are put in water to be softened.</i>	'All year the <b>flax-dam</b> festered in the heart of the townland'	<i>The poet is creating the setting of a farm or the countryside.</i>
<b>Festered</b>		'All year the flax-dam <b>festered</b> in the heart of the townland'	

<b>clotted</b>		'frogspawn that grew like <b>clotted</b> water in the shade of the banks'	
<b>invaded</b>		'the angry frogs <b>invaded</b> the flax-dam'	
<b>cocked</b>		'Right down the dam gross-bellied frogs were <b>cocked</b> on sods'	
<b>pulsed</b>		'their loose necks <b>pulsed</b> like sails'	
<b>Obscene</b>		'the slap and plop were <b>obscene</b> threats'	

**Extension:** Create an icon (visual representation) of each word in the space below to help your understanding of the language used in the poem.

Spend no longer than thirty minutes on this activity. You may complete this activity by annotating the copy of the poem in this booklet OR in your poetry anthology if you have it with you. If you run out of space, feel free to print another copy of the poem off OR write on a different piece of paper. We will go through this again in class so please do not worry about missing anything. Complete the 'find it, highlight it, annotate it' task by looking at the line number each question directs you to, highlighting what is needed and answering the questions as annotations on your poem. If you miss any questions out, that's fine BUT underline, circle or highlight ones you need to come back to later.

1. Highlight the **positive imagery** in one colour. Highlight the **negative imagery** in another colour. What do you notice?
  2. **Line 1 – 'festered in the heart'**. This language is associated with decay but what is happening to the heart? Explain your understanding.
  3. **Line 2 – 'heavy headed'**. What does the personification reflect?
  4. **Line 3** – What has happened to the flax plants? Is there beauty here?
  5. **Line 4** – How is the sun personified?
  6. **Line 5** – Highlight the **oxymoron**. What does it show?
  7. **Line 6** – Highlight the **sibilance**. What does it sound like?
  8. **Lines 8, 16 and 17** – Highlight the **childlike language**. What age is Heaney here? Is it the past or present? How do you know?
  9. **Line 9** – What does '**clotted**' mean? What image does it present to the reader? What is the effect.
  10. **Line 10** – Highlight the **alliteration**. What image does this create?
  11. **Lines 17 and 18** – Highlight the **conjunction 'and'**. What does this symbolise? *Hint: This poem is autobiographical with the poet reflecting back.*
  12. **Line 21** – Highlight the short line. This is the turning point in the poem. What is the term for this?
  13. **Line 22** – The setting of stanza 2 is the same as stanza 1. What does this emphasise?
  14. **Lines 24, 27 and 30** – Highlight the **military language**. How does it make the poet feel? Has there been a change of perspective? Explain your thoughts.
  15. **Line 25** – Highlight the **alliteration**. What sound does it resemble?
  16. **Line 28** – Highlight the **simile**. Why is this unusual? What does it exaggerate?
  17. **Line 29** – Highlight the **onomatopoeia**. Why does this threaten the poet? Consider the use of **plosives**.
  18. **Line 30** – Highlight the **simile**. What image does this create for the reader and the poet? How does it make nature sound?
  19. **Line 31** – How does the poet react? Has there been a change of perspective? Why? Explain.
  20. **Lines 31 and 32** – Highlight the **personification**. How does the poet feel about the frogs now?
  21. **Line 33** – Highlight the **dynamic verb**. How does the poem end? How does the poet and reader feel about nature? Has the view changed since the start of the poem?
- CHALLENGE – This is a rich memory for Heaney.** What senses are being used in the poem? What does the use of sensory language allow the reader to do?
- EXTRA CHALLENGE** – What do the contrasting descriptions of frogspawn and frogs suggest about growing up?
- EXTRA CHALLENGE** – How does Heaney present feelings of fascination and disgust in the poem?

## Activity #5 – Tier 2 Vocabulary

Spend no longer than ten minutes on this section. Complete the following activity on vocabulary that will come in useful when writing about 'Death of a Naturalist' in an essay.

The poem charts the way growing up changes the perception of nature and the latent danger that it presents.

Write a new definition in your own words:

Use the term correctly in a sentence:

# latent

*hidden or concealed; lying dormant*

Write a question where the word is the answer:

Think of other words that mean the same thing (synonyms) and make a list below:

Draw an icon/symbol to illustrate the key word:

## Activity #6 – Find a line that shows...

Spend no longer than five minutes on this section. Read the points below and find a quotation which evidences them. Look at the example to help you.

**Eg. The poet was enthusiastic about nature when he was young.**

*'But best of all...'*

1. As an adult, the poet now feels threatened by nature.
2. The poet feels repulsed by nature.

## Activity #7 – YouTube Analysis

This activity is optional but if you are aiming for a grade B or above, you should complete it if you have access to the internet. Follow these links: <https://youtu.be/eGbyTXVwQG4> - <https://youtu.be/5eIsLpSaOi4> Make notes in the grid below on each section of the video. Completing this activity will take you over your 90 minute slot BUT to achieve those higher grades, you MUST push yourself!

You could also listen to the Poetry Podcasts to help you.

<b>Change (age, nature)</b>	<b>Violence</b>
<b>Disgust</b>	<b>Nature</b>

Summarise your notes from the video/podcast into four key points:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



## Activity #8 – Themes

Spend no longer than two minutes on this section.

### Themes:

Consider the 'big ideas' explored in Ted Hughes' 'Hawk Roosting'. Tick the ones you think apply to the poem and check your answers at the back of the booklet.

Power	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fascination	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Violence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emotions	<input type="checkbox"/>	Military	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change	<input type="checkbox"/>	Religion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Negative Emotions	<input type="checkbox"/>	War	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disgust	<input type="checkbox"/>	Place	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Activity #9 – Answer the question

Answer the following question in full sentences. Aim for two paragraphs minimum. This section will be marked by your teacher. Ensure you put in your best effort.

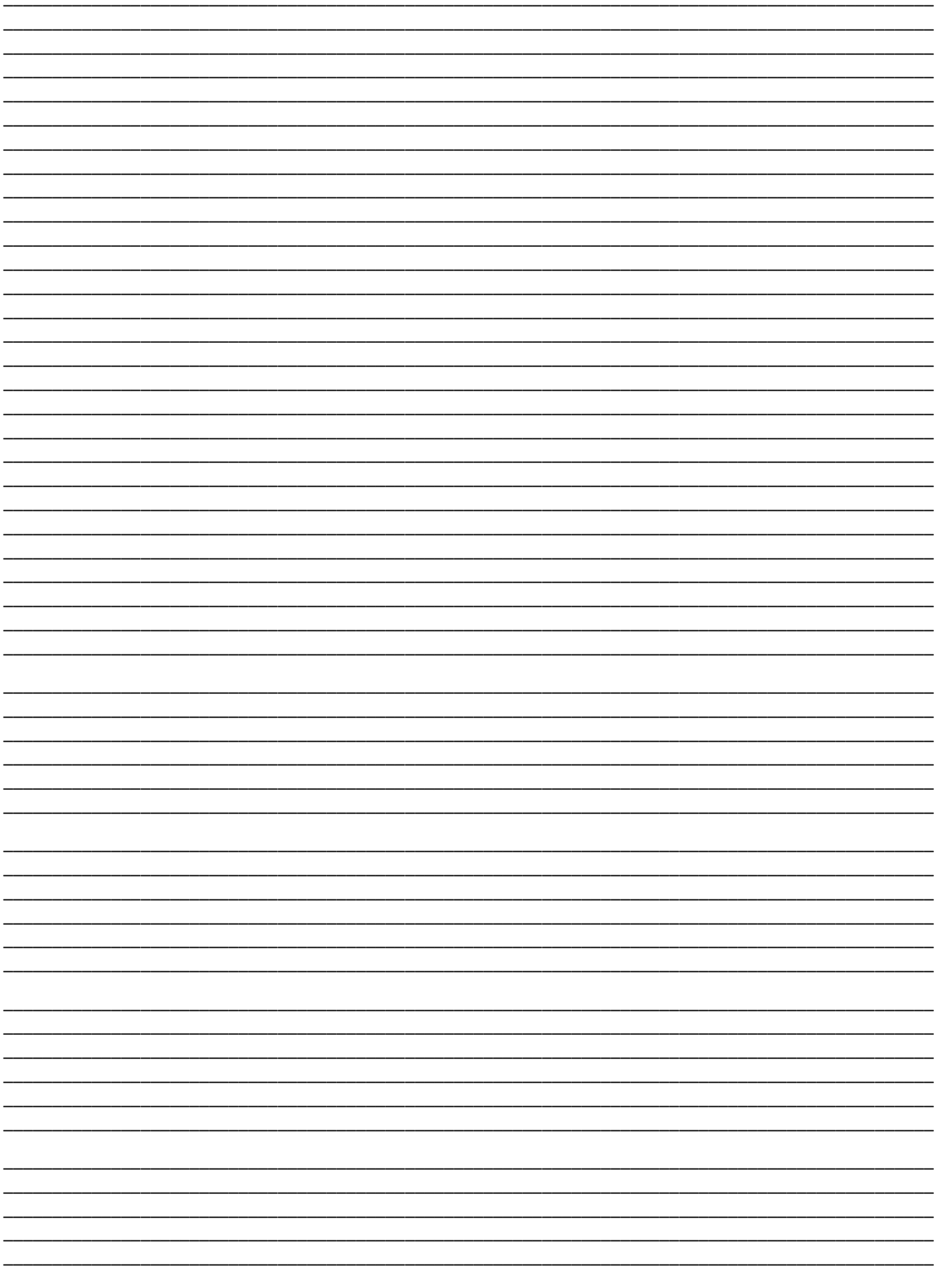
### How is nature presented in Heaney's Death of a Naturalist?

#### Don't forget to include:

- a clear point at the beginning of each paragraph which answers the question.
- 2 to 3 paragraphs
- quotations and single word analysis. Explain why Heaney has used a certain word or phrase and the impression it gives.
- points about authorial intent. What is Heaney teaching/warning/revealing the importance of/criticising or celebrating?

#### Stuck? Start like this:

*Nature is presented as threatening towards the poet as an adult. But as a child, nature has a **latent** danger that goes unnoticed due to enthusiasm and fascination with the natural world. This is evident when Heaney states...*



Vocabulary



Mark your answers to the vocabulary activity. Your definition does not need to be worded exactly as it is here but you should be able to tell whether you have the correct answer or not.

CLARIFY  
TRICKY  
VOCABULARY

Word	Add the definition	Read the word in context	What does the line mean?
<b>Flax-dam</b>	<i>A place where bundles of flax (a plant) are put in water to be softened.</i>	'All year the <b>flax-dam</b> festered in the heart of the townland'	<i>The poet is creating the setting of a farm or the countryside.</i>
<b>Festered</b>	<i>Rotten and offensive to the senses.</i>	'All year the flax-dam <b>festered</b> in the heart of the townland'	<i>Nature repulses the poet as he reflects back on his youthful adventures. It could also demonstrate how he has had a change of heart.</i>
<b>clotted</b>	<i>A thick mass of material stuck together.</i>	'frogspawn that grew like <b>clotted</b> water in the shade of the banks'	<i>Something that would fascinate children is made to sound disgusting and repulsive by the adult poet.</i>
<b>Invaded</b>	<i>Enter in large numbers to occupy an area. (A parasite or disease spreading)</i>	'the angry frogs <b>invaded</b> the flax-dam'	<i>Military language is used to demonstrate how the frogs are unwanted in the flax-dam.</i>
<b>cocked</b>	<i>Raise a gun in order to make it ready for firing.</i>	'Right down the dam gross-bellied frogs were <b>cocked</b> on sods'	<i>The frogs are ready to attack the poet as they take back their habitat. They are seen as threatening and oppressive.</i>
<b>pulsed</b>	<i>Beat or sound with a strong, regular rhythm.</i>	'their loose necks <b>pulsed</b> like sails'	<i>The poet is exaggerating how disgusting the frogs are to the reader. A change from how children find frogs fascinating.</i>
<b>Obscene</b>	<i>Offensive or disgusting by accepted standards of morality and decency.</i>	'the slap and plop were <b>obscene</b> threats'	<i>The soundscape that is created by the poet demonstrates a threatening and oppressive tone.</i>

## Themes

These are the **THREE** main themes that 'Death of a Naturalist' relates to. If you ticked something else, ensure you correct it in your booklet.

Power

Fascination

Nature

Violence

Emotions

Military

Change

Religion

Negative Emotions

War

Disgust

Place