




Province of the
EASTERN CAPE
EDUCATION

DIRECTORATE SENIOR CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT (SEN-FET)

HOME SCHOOLING SELF-STUDY WORKSHEET

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| SUBJECT | English EHL & EFAL | GRADE | 11 (EHL) & 12 (EFAL) | DATE | ...04.2020 |
| TOPIC | Poem : Mid-Term Break | TERM 1 REVISION | (Please tick) √ | TERM 2 CONTENT | (Please tick) |
| TIME ALLOCATION | 50 Minutes | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>TIPS TO KEEP HEALTHY</u></p>  <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. WASH YOUR HANDS thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Alternatively, use hand sanitizer with an alcohol content of at least 60%.2. PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING – keep a distance of 1m away from other people.3. PRACTISE GOOD RESPIRATORY HYGIENE: cough or sneeze into your elbow or tissue and dispose of the tissue immediately after use.4. TRY NOT TO TOUCH YOUR FACE. The virus can be transferred from your hands to your nose, mouth and eyes. It can then enter your body and make you sick.5. STAY AT HOME. | | | |
| INSTRUCTIONS | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• On the following pages there is Mid-Term Break notes and questions for a Reading Practice Activity.• Answer all the questions.• Mark your answers for ALL of the questions.• Read the NOTES ON CONTENT at the bottom to assist you with the general approach to the poem. | | | | |

MID-TERM BREAK by SEAMUS HEANEY

1 I sat all morning in the **college** sick bay
2 Counting bells **knelling** classes to a close.
3 At two o'clock our neighbours drove me home.
4 In the porch I met my father crying –
5 He had always taken funerals in his stride –
6 And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.
7 The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram
8 When I came in, and I was embarrassed
9 By old men standing up to shake my hand
10 And tell me they were 'sorry for my trouble'.
11 Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,
12 Away at school, as my mother held my hand
13 In hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs.
14 At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived
15 With the corpse, **stanced** and bandaged by the nurses.
16 Next morning I went up into the room. **Snowdrops**
17 And candles soothed the bedside; I saw him
18 For the first time in six weeks. Paler now,
19 Wearing a **poppy** bruise on his left temple,
20 He lay in the four foot **box** as in his cot.
21 No **gaudy** scars, the bumper knocked him clear.
22 A four foot box, a foot for every year.

College – referring to his school

Knelling – the poet hears the school bell ringing (though it knells like a funeral bell)

Stanced – dressed to stop the flow of blood (sometimes spelled staunch)

Snowdrops – a small white early spring flower

Poppy – a red flower, often associated with sheep

Box – coffin

Gaudy – showy, in bad taste

Analysis

Mid-term break is about childhood memories. An elegiac tone is established at the beginning of the poem. An elegy is a poem written to commemorate a dead person. The poem is about the death of Seamus Heaney's younger brother, Christopher who was killed by a car at the age of four.

The title might make one think that the poem is about time off school, holidays and fun, however, it is **ironic** that once you finish the poem, you realize that it is in fact a break in the family, i.e. fractured family unit. "**Break**" is a reference to the cutting of ties between the speaker and his younger brother who has died .

Structure

The equal three-lined stanzas (tercebs) represent a sense of order.

The poem seems to be split into two sections. The tone of the poem in stanza 1-5 is sombre, hence the use of depressing words that have negative connotations such as "**knelling**", "**funerals**", "**corpse**".

In the last two stanzas (6-7), the mood /atmosphere is calm / serene. (Note the use of light/ colour and words with positive connotations such as "**Snowdrops** ", "**candles**", "**Paler now**"

Stanza 1

The sombre mood of '**Mid-Term Break**' is established in the opening lines as the speaker (fourteen year old Seamus Heaney) sits in the college sick bay with nothing to do but count the bells "knelling classes to a close".

The speaker uses the word "**knelling**" instead of ringing, this gives us a hint of the mood. Classes normally close with the 'joyful' ringing of bells but the speaker makes it sound like classes close with a dong, dong, dong of a funeral bell. Plainly the speaker is thinking about death to such an extent that all bells that he hears sound like funeral bells to him. This gives the reader a clue that there might be a death in the speaker's family. He later gets picked up by neighbours from school and this confirms that something is wrong.

Stanza 2

The second stanza begins with the stark, **sad image** of the speaker's father waiting for him to return. The patriarchal image of the father-figure in the 1950s is torn down; here as we see his father crying, this indicates that something terrible has happened. The father is presumably crying in the porch because he does not want to weep in front of his family. It is a strange moment for the speaker when he sees his father crying. This was totally out of character since the father has never been bothered by funerals before, he is apparently always strong at other funerals. This appears to be a close-knit community hence Big Jim Evans, (a neighbour /family friend) says it was a "**hard blow**" (terrible blow).

The phrase "**hard blow**" has a figurative and literal meaning. The literal meaning is that the car hit the baby quite hard. The figurative meaning is that the child's death or passing was an extremely hard / tragic experience for the family as well as the neighbours.

There is an **extreme contrast** between the father's behaviour in stanza 2 and the baby sibling's behaviour in stanza 3. The father is crying because he is experienced and he understands what has happened. The baby sibling (stanza 3) is detached, unaware and innocent, she "**cooes**" (the sound of a dove) because she is happy and she does not understand what has happened.

Stanza 3

Inside the house, the speaker notices his baby sister lying in her pram “**cooing and laughing**”. The baby is happy because she is too young to understand what has happened. The baby is the only one who is happy in this house. She does not even realise that the house is filled with strangers. What has happened forces the speaker to grow up. As the eldest in the family, he is treated as an adult by neighbours. Old men stand up to shake his hand as the young speaker enters the room, treating him as a mature male member of the family and he feels embarrassed. He is not used to the idea of being taken seriously by old men because children are normally ignored. The neighbours even refer to him as the “**eldest**” which makes him question whether he now has some kind of responsibility or even some unknown expectations that the elders might have of him

Stanza 4

The speaker hears whispers, people in the room mention that he is the eldest and is still at school. The speaker does not appear severely grief-stricken like his mother, he emerges as the strongest character in his family. The neighbours' behaviour is strange (ironic), they view the speaker as a solution to the problem at hand since the father and the mother are severely grief-stricken. On the contrary, despite losing a child, the mother is not blind to the fact the speaker is still a child and needs to be comforted. The mother holds the speaker's hand.

Stanza 5

She is too upset to cry, instead she “**coughed out angry, tearless sighs**”. In this stanza we learn the cause of the tragedy in this family: an ambulance arrives with the bandaged body of the speaker's four year old brother who was killed by a car. The corpse had been “**stanced and bandaged**” by the nurses (cleaned by the nurses to stop bleeding). This is representative /symbolic of the failed attempts to save the child.

The speaker refers to his dead brother as a “**corpse**”, this symbolizes the speaker's detachment and refusal to accept the situation, he is in a state of denial and disbelief.

Stanza 6 & 7

We learn in the sixth stanza that the speaker had not seen his brother for six weeks having been “**Away at school**”. In the last two stanzas, the speaker goes to the room where his brother's body is laid out. The calm mood is shown in the serene picture of “**Snowdrops / And candles soothed the bedside**”. Snowdrops are small white early spring flowers, in this case they symbolise life after death. The imagery used in these two stanzas shows a state of transition from being numb to being at peace with his brother's passing. This is evident because he no longer refers to his brother as a “**corpse**”, instead he uses phrases like “**I saw him**”, “**He lay**”, “**knocked him**”. This signifies acceptance of the whole situation. These two stanzas also clarify to us the gender of the dead child.

This is an encounter that the whole poem has been moving towards, the climax. The words “**Paler now**”, hang at the end of the stanza causing a sad pause before the sentence continues and describes how little changed in appearance the boy is in death,

the difference being his paler complexion and 'poppy bruise' on his left temple. The dead child has **"no gaudy scars"** (he was not disfigured). There is a great tenderness and intimacy as the speaker looks at his dead brother for the last time lying in his coffin. The dead boy is lying calmly, it looks like he was not scared by death in any way. In the last line, the speaker compares the small size of his brother's coffin with the shortness of life. The shortness of the last line also signifies the child's life was cut short.

Note that the speaker says that his brother is **"Wearing a poppy"** to indicate that his brother is bruised. The speaker feels that the bruise is foreign, it is not a part of his brother. He sees him as **metaphorically** wearing a poppy as though it is something that can be removed. The use of the word **poppy** is an excellent choice since it symbolizes remembrance.

In the last line the speaker uses sound devices like **alliteration, assonance, repetition** and a caesural pause to emphasize the age when his brother died. The deliberate stress of "f" sound in the final line indicates that the speaker is justifiably angry and bitter at the waste of life that has occurred.

Literary devices used

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|--------------|--|
| Onomatopoeia | baby "cooed" (the sound made by the baby imitates the coo sound made by a dove. |
| Euphemism | "sorry for my trouble" is a euphemism for the death of his brother. |
| Contrast | stanza 2-crying father(experienced) stanza 3 -happy baby (ignorant) |
| Alliteration | "A four foot box, a foot for every year." Counting...classes to a |
| Assonance | " A four foot box, a foot for every year" Line 14-15 : at ,ambulance, arrived, stanced and bandaged (The short " a" sound could suggest the abrupt end to his brother's life) |
| Repetition | "A four foot box, a foot for every year. |
| Rhyme | "clear" and "year" (this rhyme serves to stress the tragedy in the reader's mind. |
| Enjambment | (line 9& 12) could suggest the confusion surrounding the death and the speaker's arrival at home. |
| Caesura | i.e. a pause near the middle of a line, e.g "With the corpse, stanced and bandaged" (The comma forces the reader to stop and revise the pain) |

Activity

1. What is unusual about the title of the poem? (2)

2. Refer to line 2: Counting bells knelling classes to a close.
 - 2.1 Name the figure of speech used in the line. (1)
 - 2.2 Discuss the effect this figure of speech has on the mood of the poem. (2)

3. Refer to lines 4 – 6: ‘In the porch ... a hard blow.’
 - 3.1 Discuss the significance of the parenthesis in these lines. (2)
 - 3.2 Discuss the ambiguity (literal and figurative meaning) of the words ‘a hard blow’ in the context of the poem. (2)

- 4 Refer to line 13: ‘and coughed out angry sighs’
In your opinion, whom was the mother angry with? Explain your answer. (2)

- 5 Refer to lines 16 – 18: ‘Next morning I ... weeks. Paler now,’
Name the figure of speech used in line 17. (1)

- 6 Refer to lines 19 – 21: ‘Wearing a poppy ... knocked him clear.’
 - 6.1 Quote ONE word which emphasis that the bruise didn’t belong on the boy’s face. (1)
 - 6.2 Discuss the significance of the bruise being compared to a poppy.
Mention TWO points. (2)
 - 6.3 Refer to line 20: shortly say what the speaker’s brother looks like to him? (1)

7. Identify and discuss the theme of the poem. (3)