

"Death of a Naturalist" by Seamus Heaney | Annotation Activity

Seamus Heaney is one of my (Mrs. O'Dell's) very favorite poets, and this is one of my very favorite poems. Seamus (pronounced SHAY-mus) Heaney is an Irish poet, and I think you really get something different out of the poem by hearing him read in his thick Irish accent. Watch him reading his poem [here](#)

Death of a Naturalist

BY SEAMUS HEANEY

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.
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
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
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

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
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
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.

Annotation Activities

1. Read the poem (or let Seamus Heaney read it to you!)
2. [Watch this great video](#) where a naturalist talks about why this is her favorite poem.
3. Bold any words you do not know an official definition for AND any words you

kind of know but want to know more about.

4. Choose ONE of those bolded words, highlight it, and add a comment where you explore it a bit. What does it mean? What is its part of speech? Where does this word come from? What connections can you build between this word and other words? What is the connotation of the word? (vocabulary.com and etymonline.com are great resources to help you!)
5. Highlight in yellow all the words/phrases that have a positive connotation. Highlight in blue all the words/phrases that have a negative connotation.

At the end of the poem, add a comment about what this color-coding reveals to you about the structure (the PARTS) of the poem. Does this coincide with the two big stanzas? Do you see a pattern emerging that might have some meaning?

6. At the end of the poem, add a second comment where you reflect on how Heaney uses stanzas differently than Clint Smith and/or Maggie Smith.



Frogspawn