

(30 minutes) Examine the ideas of life and death in a literary work. What does life mean? What does death entail? In what manner and through what devices are they portrayed? What roles do they play in the work and how are they significant in it?

Student V

### The Life of a Poet, the Death of a Naturalist

"In the heart" of Seamus Heaney's "Death of a Naturalist" pulses the forces of life. That the town's livelihood depends on the rotting and disintegration of flax shows the intertwining of these two opposite ideas. That nature's bubbling process of decomposition give birth to vivid imagery and inspire the speaker's poetic compositions turn the opposing ideas into a mingling of elements that are necessary for creation. The lint hole where the flax plants die become a heated pot where "a strong gauze of sound," even stronger smells, colorful insects, and "the warm thick slobber" of future baby frogs are born. The rich auditory, olfactory, visual, and tactile imagery is fuel for a poet's imagination and writing.

Miss Walls teaches the young child fascinated with nature about the biological units of creation: "daddy frog" plus "mammy frog" create "frogspawn," and naturalist observation: frogs' skin color changes with the weather. Heaney's poem shifts tone in the second stanza where the child's naturalistic curiosity ends with "best" frogspawn giving way to sickening "slime kings." The strong imagery is still alive but the biological interest is gone. Emerging from the onomatopoeic "slap and plop" and the darkly threatening blobs of "mud grenades" are negative war connotations that turn mere imagery into meaningful layers of crafted words. Heaney presents a double paradoxical war where emotions overrule objective observation and figurative language overwhelms literal scientific description. Metaphor kills direct language. And so, one witnesses upon a future naturalist's death, the blooming of a young poet.