

Overview

Each week you will receive a poem to spend time with over the weekend. They will often come from our featured poet, but not always. You should read the poem first to enjoy it, then to understand it. Remember: poems are always better when read aloud so you can hear and feel the shape of the words. You should write the explication of and response to the poem on the back. The front should show evidence of close reading—e.g., underlined words, miscellaneous annotations. For more precise suggestions, go to www.englishcompanion.com and click on “Reading a Poem” on the main page.

Mid-Term Break by Seamus Heaney

I sat all morning in the college sick bay
Counting bells knelling classes to a close.
At two o'clock our neighbours drove me home.

In the porch I met my father crying—
He had always taken funerals in his stride—
And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.

The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram
When I came in, and I was embarrassed
By old men standing up to shake my hand

And tell me they were 'sorry for my trouble'.
Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,
Away at school, as my mother held my hand

In hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs.
At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived
With the corpse, stanced and bandaged by the nurses.

Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops
And candles soothed the bedside; I saw him
For the first time in six weeks. Paler now,

Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple,
He lay in the four-foot box as in his cot.
No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

A four-foot box, a foot for every year.