

# H1 Sample Answer | Seamus Heaney

## 'Heaney explores thought-provoking themes in an accessible narrative style'

Seamus Heaney is an iconic Irish poet renowned for his thought-provoking verse and refreshingly simple narrative style. Heaney's combination of familiar themes and conversation-like narration has immersed me as an avid reader. Heaney's poetic prowess compels me to become emotionally embedded in each story he regales. Despite Heaney's personal themes, his comfortable narrative language enhances the poems universal accessibility.

'The Harvest Bow' explores a thought-provoking theme in a comfortable narrative style. The obvious theme of this poem is the taciturn relationship Heaney and his father share: 'As you plaited the harvest bow you implicated the mellowed silence in you'. I feel that the harvest bow encapsulates the relationship in the sense that actions speak louder than words. Heaney's soothing narrative tone adds fluency to the poem, directing me from image to image, whilst simultaneously reinforcing the powerful love that permeates this narrative. It is indisputable that Heaney's father is a skilled man, 'harked to their gift and worked with fine intent until your fingers moved somnambulant'. Heaney's father utilises this skill to craft the harvest bow in hope that his son will remember and understand this moment when he is older. As Heaney guides me to the next stanza, I am greeted by the heart-warming image of an older Heaney reminiscing the days gone by. 'And if I spy into its golden loops I see us walk between the railway slopes'. This perfect collaboration of a provocative theme and narration encouraged me to think of my own father and my own memorable experiences as a child. 'The Harvest Bow' is one of the most touching poems I have ever read. Heaney's ability to address the theme of a father-son relationship with such a refreshingly simple narrative style has had a great effect on me as a reader.

Ultimately, it afforded me a reminder that genuine love can be communicated through subtle gestures.

'A Call' much like 'The Harvest Bow', addresses Heaney's bond with his father. 'A Call' recreates the scene from a time Heaney rang home to his parents. The poem opens with direct speeches, drawing the reader into the familiar scene immediately. "Hold on", she said, "I'll just run out and get him". As he waits for his father Heaney, envisions him 'down on his hands and knees [...] gently pulling up everything not tapered, frail and leafless'. Heaney's portrait of his elderly father reveals the poet's care and concern. The word 'frail' could be seen to describe his deteriorating physical condition. In this narrative poem, Heaney contemplates the inevitability of his father's passing and in doing so, begins to build on his thoughts. Heaney's reflection prompted me to ponder the uneasy idea of my own parents' mortality. Despite the discomfort this brings me, it is a credit to Heaney's provocative verse. Heaney effortlessly narrates us through his consciousness until the dramatic closing line, 'next thing he spoke and I nearly said I loved him'. This conclusive line almost humorously sums up Heaney's reticent relationship with his father as he promptly neglects his previous worries and swings back to reality. In summation, the deceptively simple narrative style of this poem provokes a profound reflection on mortality.

'The Forge' presents a welcomed change in thematic focus and narrative style. The poem depicts the life of a blacksmith whose craft has fallen victim to modernity. Heaney adopts a noticeably grave tone and it becomes apparent to me that, like 'A Call', there is more to this poem than meets the eye. I feel that 'The Forge' can be seen as an analogy for a poet and his artistic prowess. The narrative voice describes the work place as 'a door into the dark'. The stern tone adopted here gives me the impression that the artistic process is a private one and one that we should respect. Heaney's employment of punctuation adds weight to the verse which elevates his application of accessible narrative language. This is most effective when Heaney describes the anvil with 'set there immovable: an altar'. I find myself contemplating the

permanence of art after noticing the reverence attached to this line. Through his story-like narration, Heaney creates the vivid and poignant characterisation of the defeated blacksmith, 'he leans out on the jamb, recalls a clatter of hoofs where traffic is flashing in rows; then grunts and goes in'. This heart-breaking image forces the question of whether moving forward is really that good, especially if we're leaving some people behind. Conclusively, 'The Forge' is perhaps the most thought-provoking poem I have studied as it compels me to question society. This curiosity is heavily influenced by Heaney's consistent use of accessible language.

'A Constable Calls' portrays a world in which foreign rule dictates the day-to-day lives of ordinary people like Seamus Heaney and his father. Similar to that of 'The Forge', Heaney employs a series of provocative images within his narrative style. The poem recreates the scene of when an RUC officer came to make an account of Patrick Heaney's tillage returns. The constable is evidently an unwelcome visitor and tension is permeated throughout the scene. 'The pedal threads hanging relieved of the boot of the law'. As Heaney fluently leads me through the verse, his father's irritation grows in abundance. His father audaciously lies to the constable's face and the young Heaney begins to internally panic, 'I assumed small guilts and sat imagining the black hole in the barracks'. This effective use of emotionally provocative language placed me in the mindset of a fear-engulfed child forcing me to imagine what such a scenario would be like. Heaney's simplistic narrative style effortlessly carries me to the closing line, 'His boot pushed off and the bicycle ticked, ticked, ticked'. As the ticking sound echoes in my head it provokes the relevance of an epidemic that tortured the lives of thousands, including Heaney. 'A Constable Calls' ultimately provides an insight into the lives of those who live in troubled environments.

In conclusion, I have found Seamus Heaney's poetry to be consistently interesting and thought-provoking. With his refreshingly simple narrative style, his themes are effectively and effortlessly conveyed. Although his poetry can be deeply personal, it

equally offers a universal meaning. Heaney's capacity to turn trivial everyday events into profound moments of discovery is what has appealed to me the most.