

Anseo ag Staisiun Chaiseal Na gCorr

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d'aimsigh mise m'oiléán rúin

Cathal O Searcaigh says:

'the area is Irish speaking and I was brought up speaking Irish...Irish is the language of my soul.'

'that whole idea of home is a vitally important thing to my work. I only discovered this when I was a teenager and I went off to London. I became acutely aware then of home and became aware that I was in an alien environment... something of not being recognised, of not having a face, of not having a name, of not having a place and I realised that all of these were here.'

'a lot of my poems have become an act of re-possession. Re-possessing tongue and tradition to a large extent.'

Suggestions for work on HERE AT CAISEAL NA GCORR STATION by CATHAL O SEARCAIGH

TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION

In certain countries, under strict, authoritarian governments and regimes writers have often been persecuted, locked-up or forced into exile. In groups do some research and find examples of places where writers have suffered such ill-treatment. Discuss why writers in particular should find themselves targeted in such a way. Looking at this poem, what spirit reigns in the place that Cathal O Searcaigh describes? Is this 'territory' similar to or different from those places you unearthed in your research?

OR

Do you possess a 'sense of place,' a geography of the heart? If so, describe it and say what special qualities it has for you, why it is so important to you.

Points to consider:

1. In your own words write a description of the countryside or landscape depicted in the poem.
2. What does the poet say he has discovered at Caiseal na gCorr?
3. What is a refuge? What is a sanctuary?
4. Why should the poet feel justified in feeling 'permanence' in this place? What does he mean by this 'permanence'?
5. What do you think the poet's people have been doing in this 'territory'?
6. What words and images show us that by accepting his 'fate' as a poet, Cathal O Searcaigh feels he has not broken any tradition but has rather stayed very much 'in tune' with his 'environment'?
7. What do you think the poet means when he says: '...I challenge the void/exactly as my people challenged the wilderness...'
8. Look at the last line. By becoming a poet what 'contradictions' might he have feared?
9. How is he 'the pulse of his people'?
10. Look up the word 'reclamation' in the dictionary. Find its meaning. Then find out its etymology (check the dictionary). In what way does this word then become very appropriate to this poem?

Final thoughts for discussion:

Read Seamus Heaney's poems DIGGING and FOLLOWER and consider how O Searcaigh's poem might share certain ideas and features with these two poems. Consider the poems you have studied as regards a 'sense of place' and write about what they have revealed to you about the poet's place in society. How important a part do you think poets play in society?

Points to consider:

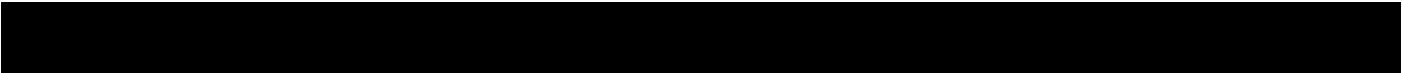
1. The poet's father was a country doctor or GP. List the evidence from the poem that would support this fact.
2. What key image in the poem does the title link up with? Explore the possible significance of the title?
3. From a close reading of the poem, write a character study of Elaine Gaston's father. Discuss his public and his private personas.
4. Explain in what way 'a thousand people' have leaned on him.
5. Explain the flash-back technique in the poem and in what ways has the poet 'learned to make the loop'?

Final thoughts for discussion:

Seamus Heaney's poem _____ is about the changing role within a father/son relationship. Groups might compare the two poems and discuss what images and emotions the poems share. What differences are there between the two?

Gary Snyder's poem _____ might also be usefully included in such a discussion.

In a poem about visiting his mother in hospital, Robert Sund talks about how we 'Die daily of unexpressed affection.' On a personal, individual level, ask pupils to focus on a member of their own family and think of an appropriate and effective image or series of images that somehow captures how they feel about that person. This might develop into a poem or piece of descriptive writing.



2. The poet tends to use imagery associated with angels throughout the poem. Point to some examples of this imagery and comment on its effectiveness.
3. The picture presented in the poem is a visual one, but sounds dominate the first stanza. Why do you think this is so?
4. What do you understand by the title of the poem?
5. Look closely at the last stanza. What do you think it means? Do you think that this stanza reflects the poet's optimistic view of life?

Final thoughts for discussion:

Do you get the feeling that the poet has a great affection for her city? She seems to want to share her picture by giving such a detailed account. Pick out words and phrases that have a significance for you and comment on why you like them.

