

English Department

Heaney Trip

On a bleak, rainy morning in February 2022, 20 Year 13 English literature students travelled to Bellaghy to visit the Heaney Homeplace. Perhaps it wasn't exactly everyone's idea of a thrilling school trip; but since we're English literature students, it didn't take much more than the promise of a free lunch and some help with our unit one assessment to convince us.

Spirits weren't exactly high as we waited in the rain for the bus to arrive, and the prospect of the hour long drive certainly wasn't helping matters, but an utterly tuneless singalong to some pop classics on the bus was enough to lift spirits for our arrival in Bellaghy. Once inside, we were shown around the interactive Heaney exhibit. Our guide pointed out Heaney's Conway Stewart pen and some of the letters he wrote to his parents before giving us a brief background on Heaney's life. In the main part of the exhibit, we were given headsets and moved around the downstairs room which was split into sections corresponding with different events in Heaney's life; as we pressed a button on our headsets, we could hear Heaney's voice reciting his poems. Having spent 6 months studying Heaney's work, analysing and deconstructing every carefully placed word, it was amazing to simply sit and

listen to Heaney recite the poems he wrote, coming to life as he spoke.

Following our tour, we attended a lecture on two of the poems on the AS specification, 'Had I Not Been Awake' by Seamus Heaney, and 'Acquainted with the Night' by Robert Frost. This seminar not only aided with the essay we were later assigned on these poems, but we learned invaluable exam skills that really helped us in our Unit One English module, and also gained a flavour of what university lectures would be like. Following a quick lunch break, we split up into small group seminars with post-graduate Queen's University English students to discuss our thoughts on the poems, and before we knew it, it was time to embark on the journey home.

We returned back to Banbridge in significantly better weather conditions

Find the

So if, my dear, there
Old bridges breaking





End-rhyme

Rhyme is the repetition of syllables that sound identical. The most well-known rhyme in poetry is probably the end-rhyme, when a word at the end of one line rhymes with a word at the end of another line.



than the journey down, but with a significantly more tuneless singalong than before (hard to believe, I know, but several people had the migraine to prove it). Regardless of our group's somewhat reluctant initial approach to the trip, I can safely say that it greatly enhanced our understanding and enjoyment of the poems we were studying. I'd highly encourage anyone studying AS English, or with an even remote interest in Irish poetry or artisan sausage rolls to try and get down to the exhibit.



Anatomy of a poem

Find the Rhyme
So if, my dear, there sometimes seem to be old bridges breaking between you and me

End-rhyme
Rhyme is the repetition of syllables that sound identical. The most well-known rhyme in poetry is probably the end-rhyme, when a word at the end of one line rhymes with a word at the end of another line.

Internal rhyme
Internal rhyme is when a word within one line rhymes with another word in the same line.

Half-rhyme
A half-rhyme is a rhyme formed when only one or two syllables of the words match. Usually, only one syllable of the words matches. For example, 'The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain'.

Set the Sound
The sound of a word is called its phonetic structure.

Alliteration
Alliteration is the repetition of the same letter or sound at the beginning of words in a line of poetry.

Sibilance
Sibilance is the repetition of the 's' sound in a line of poetry.

Slashes, chill gates, wet slates, the greens and reds of outhouse roofs.

Late August, given heavy rain and sun for a full week, the blackberries would ripen.

Something Slobbered Curtly, Close Smudging the Silence

...maybe it's to get away from him, Skittering his spit across the stove.

Creative Writing

In January, pupils were encouraged (by their English teachers) to enter Rotary Ireland's: 'Young Writer Competition'. The challenge was to produce a piece of prose or poetry entitled, 'Environment'.

The entry was to be a maximum of 550 hundred words for prose entries and up to a maximum of 40 lines for poetry entries.

In the Intermediate category, Ibrahim Saleem Chaudhry was placed first with Ellie Conlon coming second and Molly Conlon and Matthew Gough Joint 3rd. In the Senior category, Beth Cordner was placed first.

The entries are included below:

Environment

By Beth Cordner

Warmth. Food. Safety. Love. Isn't that the expected environment for a young child, hell, of any breathing organism? Why is it then that I am the only one faced with the polar opposite?

My environment: a cramped city flat, with a rusty sofa-bed in one corner. Home.

My mother sat in the opposite corner, hypnotised by the voice of a gambling host, prompting her to cash in her savings. It would be unusual to see her without a large bottle of vodka in her hand. Yes, she was an alcoholic.

I grew up sneaking cash out of men's pockets who would come to visit my mother – they left their jacket at home while they went 'to get groceries' together. I could easily find enough money to buy a sandwich – the only meal I would receive. I went to school and tried my best to stay unnoticed, but each day I came home bruised.

I can't say my life was all bad. After school, I would eagerly rush to my escapism: skateboarding. Feeling the wind slash through my hair at lightening speed made me feel in control; it made me feel alive.

Usually I would pack up my worn

skateboard and head out of the door unnoticed, but today was different.

"Whhuure yu gooin'?" yelled my mother, with an uneasy tone. She pulled herself out of her armchair and stumbled over to my only exit – my only chance at liberty.

"Why would you care? I bet you £50 the *Gambler's Game Show* is already live," I snapped back sarcastically, edging closer to the doorknob.

"Well I bet yeh £1000 that if yew don't come back to this house with ma magic water, yer nat gonna have a bed tonight, ye hear?" Her 'magic water' is a substance that smells like vodka, but I would guess there's more to it than that. Each Wednesday my job was to pick up the vile liquid.

"Whatever." I replied dryly, slamming the door shut.

Freedom. I set my board on the ground. Nothing held me back now. With a push I was away, whooshing down the bumpy paths to the ramps. At this precise time, there would be no one there. I am free to flip, jump and grind around the graffitied concrete.

After several hours of bliss, I skated



back to the flat. Everything was as I left it. Except, everything was different. There were no peculiar men in the flat. The TV sat noiseless. The battered armchair lay without its occupier. It was all gone.

I was sitting in my corner. The voices around me were muffled – countless questions swirled through my head. Through the avalanche, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I looked up to see a young man, dressed in a grey suit with a name card reading 'RH Social Work Services'. Without a word spoken, he placed the creased piece of paper into my palm and smiled. Curious, I cautiously opened it and began to read: *'Looking for a new start? Be in with the chance of winning £10,000 at Benny's Skateboarding Station by showing us your skills this Friday. Are you in?'*

Was this the chance I had been looking for? Should I do it? Why not? I have nothing to lose anymore. Friday...

The Last Hours

Ibrahim Saleem Chaudhry

The Earth. What a beautiful thing it was. An elegant, deep blue orb with flecks of white. Vibrant, emerald green plates of land on the surface, and pale, soft yellow kints across the land. A wondrous world, that was destroyed. There is no beauty any more, only dim, ugly brown with spots of dirty blue. Every time I look out and try to find the beauty I once saw, I see the same rubbish pile that we created, a filthy pile filled with hope that didn't exist. The past looks like a dream compared to the horrifying future, or my present. Existence is pointless, it is endless suffering and dissatisfaction with the world. We always want to escape to a different reality better than ours, rather than shape our own.

As I am writing this, I have twenty-four hours left to live, before oxygen completely runs out. I am floating in space, orbiting the Earth on a spaceship, as some people might call it. Our mission, named Project Abluo, was to clean up any waste or dangerous objects surrounding the Earth. Many years later, that mission is still incomplete and there is still junk everywhere.

Down on Earth, during the years we spend up here, everyone was trying

to do their part in stopping or slowing down the inevitable destruction of our environment. We moved to electric vehicles, biodegradable products, nuclear power plants, recycled plastics and many other alternatives, but it was already too late. Society slowly began to collapse and fall into dreadful chaos. People started having to check their phones regularly to see if it was safe to go outside. Air quality dropped and kept dropping rapidly. Sea levels were rising to dangerous heights. Fewer forests existed and more parts of the Earth were becoming inhospitable for humans. The Earth was transforming into a toxic, uninhabitable sphere of garbage. And nobody could do anything about it. All I could do was watch from above.

Year after year went by as quickly as passing space debris, and there is nothing left of the world. We watched it crumble and perish with every last human alive on it. Whilst knowing that soon we would run out of food, water and oxygen ourselves, and become the last survivors. That day is today. All of my comrades are dead, due to a massive oxygen outage that affected everyone's personal bedroom, including mine, three days ago. I just survived by completely blocking off all



parts of the spaceship except for my room remotely. I then activated the back-up oxygen supply that we kept for emergencies like this and directed all the oxygen to my room. This may sound selfish, but there was only enough oxygen to support one person. That oxygen has nearly run out, and I am now going to sleep. I haven't slept in a while.

I have no choice but to accept my fate and hope that one day, this is found by some sort of intelligent creature. I probably won't wake up, but that doesn't matter, any more at least.

Environment

Molly Conlon

I Attempt a Normal Day.

I walk to school. I am wearing my oxygen mask. Not exactly what people envisioned 2050 to be like. We punished the environment and so now it punishes us.

We used to cut down trees, diminishing their purpose. They decide that they should no longer serve us. They absorb the oxygen we have (the remains of it anyway) and produce carbon dioxide.

We strangled the fish in the sea—

Suddenly, my neck is captured by a plastic container. I choke and struggle, I fight. I fight. I fight for the plans I had for my future. I fight for the life I want with my friends and family.

My lungs expand, yet they are not filled with oxygen. I fight. I fight. Tick. Tock. The timer goes off in my head. I know my time is limited. It's a painful way to die. All I want to do is get to school, see my friends.

I fight. I fight. I have hope that I will survive. That the animals, the few that care, will rescue me. A troop of

monkeys cut me free, nurse me back to health. It's too late. I'm still alive but there shouldn't have been plastic there in the first place.

I know it will happen again and maybe next time I won't be so lucky. I live in fear, although there is nothing I do that actively puts my life in danger, a walk to the shop, to see a friend or to go to school can end up with me fighting for my life or ending up with no life.

I rely on them: the few animals that care. The few. Not enough. But still, I watch from the side, unable to communicate with them. I know they could do so much more. Yet they do not.

I take a bite of my chocolate cake that I've been looking forward to all day. Awaiting the satisfying taste that satiates my hunger. My friends are enjoying their cakes. Plastic. It's plastic. I fight. I fight. I can feel it scrape my throat.

My insides are being ripped out. Nano particles, accumulating in my brain. I fight. I fight. My central nervous system—failing. I fight. I fight. There's



nothing I can do. As much as I fight. I just want it to end. I want to stop fighting. Stop the pain.

My friends carry me home. A safe place I can always rely on. I can go peacefully with all the people and things I enjoy. I get there. It's a blaze of fire and the places that aren't burning are nothing but a pile of ashes.

My hopes for the future: they burn down with my house. My family were my foundation. They had perished and it is only appropriate that anything I had wanted to celebrate with them, should perish with them. I don't fight. I don't fight.

Flip the story. It's what our current life is. We need to open our eyes and see the agony we put these poor, unsuspecting creatures, just trying to live life through.



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Environment

Ellie Conlon

I'm writing to you from the year 2122. We haven't been outside since 2050. The government has everybody brainwashed...it's now illegal to have windows on your house or even step foot further than your driveway; unless, of course, you have a job certified by the government that permits you to.

As always, at 8.45am a lorry pulls into my driveway – I obviously cannot see it as there are no windows but I've become accustomed to the sound of the gravel crunching under its tyres and the incessant grumbling coming from the engine. I put on my mask... it's also one of the new mysterious laws. I open my front door and bring my minimalistic bag of rationed supplies to get me through the day inside.

I live alone, in an isolated area with no neighbours... as long as I'm back in time for the 6 o'clock house check (where a certified member of the government checks to see if you're still inside and haven't stolen extra rations

from your neighbours), I'll be fine.

Just before we got put into this 'lockdown', my great-grandma (who passed away) in 2062 due to what doctors disclosed as a heart attack) used to take me to this river every Sunday afternoon and we'd eat a picnic and see who could spot the most fish... I think I will take a walk back there. I mean it can't be that bad – can it? I don't put my mask on and I step out the door. I'm walking down the road and notice that, even though it's the middle of June, there are no leaves on the trees. Even though I'm a little confused I carry on walking, I can smell smoke. Thick, black smoke. I'm still determined to get to the river so I once again ignore my gut instinct and keep walking. I'm sweating – in all the summers in my time I've never experienced one so hot!

When I finally get to the location of the river I am now wheezing and spluttering from the smoke coming

from the burning hedges. I can't turn back now so I try to find the river – I'm sure it was here but all that's left is a heap of plastic.

The burning in my chest is now something I can't ignore; I now realise why we aren't allowed outside, I never should have left, especially without a mask. I'm beginning to wonder if perhaps my great-granny didn't die from a heart attack after all. I look down at my watch – it reads 5.56pm – four minutes until my foolish actions are found out. Until my brainwashed loved ones are told some fib about how I 'peacefully' died of natural causes in my house. Having no windows kept us uninformed of the shambles but the news of my misadventure and its consequence is sure going to let them know the reality.

Why has it come to this? Why did the people of the past not stop it while they could?



Environment

Matthew Gough

To think a single cigarette has the power to kill off whole civilisations of birds, bees, and butterflies. The sweet aroma of assorted flowers gone by a sweep of a hand and the thoughtless act of littering. The trees swaying in clear skies, twisting and turning; to the barren broken bones of a tree snarling and whipping as if they have a mind of their own.

These thoughts were pondered by Adam Jackson during a boring English class. They were reciting Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' when a bird, a crow maybe, banged against the window bringing joy to everyone's Tuesday mid-afternoon. This weird and wonderful event was short-lived as the rising smoke brought confusion and distress. The next few moments flew by like a torpedo in water, the fire alarm went off and the shouts of panic from the teachers to calm the students down were drowned by the screams and stomping of the feet. As the school was evacuated the smoke had risen even higher than before and there were faint sounds of sirens in the distance. Adam thought maybe his dad was there as his dad

was a firefighter. Adams's dreams of becoming a firefighter were because of this man; he idolised him. The curiosity got the better side of Adam. The boy of eleven years sprinted across the field and down the road ignoring the apprehensive shouts from the teachers; he never was a star pupil and thought the teachers might be pleased by this action of his.

The park was smoking, and everything was on fire. The firefighters were trying to gather everyone to safety, but they were struggling to do so with all the panic and dismay. Knowing that his dad was probably here, Adam was preparing to do what was needed to help without his dad noticing. He got close enough to see his dad; a bulky man built like a bull. All the flocks of birds were gone, all the kaleidoscopes of butterflies were gone, all the colonies of bees were gone. No form of wildlife was there, nothing not even the ducks in the pond.

Adam knew what had to be done and advanced towards the hose like the first man on the moon; he thought

so anyway. He snatched the hose and galloped like a horse toward the entrance and past the elderly people who seemed oblivious to the danger of their situation.

The bushes along the path were destroyed, though not a religious person Adam was reminded of the burning bush from the bible. All the grass was a pale grey and to make matters worse the wind was as strong as a wild boar.

The cause of the fire was probably at the centre of the park, usually the only thing there was the kid's playground and the cafe. He approached the playground when he heard the faint noises from his dad chasing him. Determined, Adam raced to the finish line but the smoke was now too overwhelming; the leaves of the trees were meteorites to the ants and bugs on the ground. His vision was closing in; he was going to faint. As he dropped to the floor the last thing he saw was a flaming cigarette butt.



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