Mid-Term Break

SUMMARY

I spent the morning in the nurse's office, counting the schoolbells as they announced the end of classes. At two in the afternoon, our neighbors picked me up and drove me back home.

When I got home, I saw my father crying on the porch—even though he had usually been very composed at funerals. Big Jim Evans was there too, and he said it was an especially tough loss.

The baby made little baby sounds and laughed and rocked back and forth in its carriage when I came into the house. I was embarrassed because the old men who'd come over to the house kept standing up to shake my hand.

Those men said they were "sorry for my loss." People whispered around me, saying that I was the oldest child in the family and had been away at boarding school. Meanwhile, my mother held my hand in hers.

She wasn't crying, but let out rough sighs that sounded like coughing and were full of anger. At ten o'clock, the ambulance showed up with the body, wrapped in bandages by the nurses at the hospital.

In the morning, I went up to the room where the body lay. There were snowdrop flowers and candles by the bed to make the scene more bearable. I looked at him for the first time in six weeks. He was paler now than he was the last time I'd seen him.

He had a red bruise on the left side of his forehead. He lay in a four-foot long box, just as though he were lying in bed. He didn't have any big, obvious scars. When the car's bumper hit him, it knocked him out of the way of the wheels.

His coffin was four feet long: one foot for each year that he lived.

THEMES

THE NATURE OF GRIEF

"Mid-Term Break" describes the aftermath of a tragedy: the speaker's four-year-old brother has been hit by a car and killed. But the poem doesn't spend a lot of time describing the accident or memorializing the dead child. Instead, the poem focuses on the way that other people respond to this tragedy. It specifically portrays the various ways people may express extreme grief—from sadness, to anger, to detachment. For everyone, however, the poem suggests that grief, especially that surrounding the death of a child, is a deeply destabilizing force—something powerful enough to

knock people out of their stereotypical roles and routines and turn the world upside down.

The different figures in the poem respond to grief in different ways. The speaker of the poem, for instance, is deeply uncomfortable with the attention that people pay to him because of the tragedy, "embarrassed / by old men standing up to shake [his] hand." While the speaker is awkward in the wake of tragedy—and even seems afraid to reveal his emotions—his father openly expresses a profound sadness. When the speaker first sees him, he is "crying" even though "he had always taken funerals in his stride." In other words, death doesn't usually upset the speaker's father, but he has broken down over the death of his son. And the speaker's mother has yet another reaction: she's mad, spitting out "angry tearless sighs."

The speaker's parents' reactions notably shake up traditional gender roles, underscoring the profound ability of grief to upend expected behavior. Recall that the poem is set in Ireland in the 1950s, a world in which strict social norms governed the way that people showed emotion, even how they grieved. Someone like the speaker's father would be expected to be stoic—to bear his grief silently (as indeed the speaker implies he has done in the past, "always" taking "funerals in his stride" when the deceased was not so close to him). Instead, he weeps openly. The speaker's mother, meanwhile, is "tearless." Her response to the tragedy is rage.

And yet, no one seems to object to the speaker's parents responding the way that they do—the other people in the poem silently accept their behavior. In this way, the poem suggests that grief can reshape people's social roles—especially when it comes from something as tragic as the death of a child. In turn, the ability of profound grief to disrupt social roles calls those roles themselves into question—perhaps even suggesting that the world itself is not the rational, ordered place people that societal traditions make it out to be. Essentially, grief makes the world stop making sense.

This idea is echoed towards the end of the poem when the speaker suggests that his brother's death was random, quick and "clear." There's no reason or justification for it; it was simply an accident. That raises broader questions, specifically about how such an accident can even happen if the world is just, if it makes sense. Thus the speaker notes that the "Snowdrops / and candles"—symbols of rebirth and prayer—"soothed the bedside," but not the *people* who visit it to be his brother's body; these traditional consolations fail to actually console. Grief knocks people out of their normal roles, the poem ultimately suggests, causing them to question the justice and order of the very world they live in. And though the accident didn't leave any scars on the speaker's brother, it has clearly left a series of deep

scars on the living.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

• Lines 1-22

🔍 LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-3

I sat all …
… drove me home.

The first three lines of "Mid-Term Break" introduce the poem's theme and its form. The poem begins with the speaker sitting in a "college sick bay." In other words, he's in the nurse's office at a boarding school. Because the poem is autobiographical, one can assume that this is an Irish boarding school in the 1950s. The poet, Seamus Heaney, grew up in Ireland in the 1950s and attended boarding school there. The speaker doesn't explain right away why he's in the "sick bay"—whether he's sick or not. But the poem provides some hints right away that something more unusual—and more serious—is going on.

First, in line 2, the speaker notes that he spends the morning "Counting bells knelling classes to a close." In a literal sense, he's simply listening to the bells that ring when a class period ends. But the "bells" can also be read as symbols, especially since the speaker describes them as "knelling." Bells are an important part of church services. Churches ring bells to mark funerals; funeral bells are often described as "knelling." In other words, the bells remind the speaker of funeral bells. And that makes the bells symbolic: they symbolize death and burial.

This is an ominous, unsettling symbol to appear at the beginning of the poem. It suggests that something is seriously wrong. And that sense increases in the next line, when the speaker's "neighbours" show up to drive him home—not his parents. Though the speaker hasn't yet directly acknowledged the tragedy at the heart of the poem, one has a sense that something tragic has happened.

The poem is very direct and unpretentious. Despite the symbol in the 2nd line, the speaker generally avoids figurative language, like metaphors and similes. The speaker is reporting on this tragedy as honestly as possible, in a straightforward fashion. The use of the past tense in the stanza (and throughout the poem) indicates to the reader that the speaker is describing something that's already happened: he's remembering this tragedy, rather than describing it as it happens. This means that the speaker has had some time to process it.

Furthermore, the speaker often seems very composed: it's surprising how he can describe the events surrounding his brother's death so directly. This composure is reflected in the poem's form: the way that it's organized, fairly neatly, into

tercets. In this opening stanza, the poem is unrhymed and uses both enjambment and end-stop in an un-patterned way that feels natural, unforced.

But there are also signs that the speaker is having trouble maintaining his composure. For example, his meter is often off: the poem flirts with being in iambic pentameter, but it never really achieves a solid, steady meter. For instance, after a fairly iambic first line, line 2 starts with a trochee (**stressed** unstressed), followed by a spondee (**stressed stressed**). Then it has an iamb (unstressed **stressed**), a pyrrhic (unstressed unstressed), and another iamb:

> **Count**ing | **bells knell**- | ling **clas**- | ses to | a **close**

Of this line's five feet, only two of them are iambs (though the pyrrhic here could maybe be read differently). The speaker is struggling to write a formal poem—and sometimes failing. He can't quite maintain the control necessary to sustain the poem. This suggests that there are powerful emotions under the poem's direct, straightforward language, emotions that gradually come out as the poem proceeds.

LINES 4-6

In the porch …
… a hard blow.

In lines 4-6, the speaker arrives at his house and finds his father on the porch, "crying." This heightens the sense that something is really wrong. The speaker's father is usually stoic and composed: "He had always taken funerals in his stride." In other words, he's not the kind of guy who usually cries at funerals. Indeed, in the restrictive social climate of Ireland in the 1950s, men were expected not to cry at all. But he *is* crying, even though doing so might not seem "manly" or "appropriate."

Even though the speaker still hasn't revealed exactly what's going on, the reader has a clear sense that something tragic has happened—something so tragic that the speaker's father breaks the rules of gender. (Even "Big Jim Evans," who seems almost a masculine stereotype, admits it's a "hard blow"). This hints at one of the poem's broader arguments: that grief can be so powerful that it causes people to give up their normal social roles.

As the poem moves into this second stanza, it remains very clear and direct—without a lot of pretentious or fancy language. Each of the lines 4-6 are end-stopped. As a result, these lines feel deliberate and controlled: even though the speaker is describing a very upsetting scene, he manages to keep a hold of his emotions. At least on the surface. If one digs a little deeper, one finds underlying signs of stress and powerful emotions. His meter, for instance, remains rough: line 5, for instance, has 12 syllables, 2 more than an iambic line should.

There's an assonant /i/ sound that links together "cr**y**ing" and "str**i**de." This assonance makes it feel like these lines almost

rhyme. As the poem proceeds, more and more instances of these assonant rhymes pile up. It feels like the speaker wants to write a poem in rhyme, but can't quite manage to control it. Once again, the speaker's emotions feel suppressed but present in the poem—present in the various disturbances, failures, and irregularities that crop up in the poem's form.

LINES 7-10

The baby cooed ...
... for my trouble'.

In lines 4-6, the speaker arrived at his house and saw his father crying on the porch. In lines 7-10, the speaker describes the scene inside the house. He begins with a touching and sweet detail: when he came into the room, a baby (probably one of the speaker's younger siblings) got excited. The baby didn't realize something tragic had happened; it was just happy to see the speaker, so it "cooed and laughed and rocked" in its carriage, or "pram."

The speaker uses polysyndeton here—and the device gives the line a real sense of rhythm. The line seems to rock back and forth, just like the baby. Indeed, this one of the few lines in the poem in perfect iambic pentameter. The joy of encountering the baby seems to have given the speaker some more confidence, composure, and control—enough to keep the poem, briefly, in good meter.

But after the speaker sees the baby, he turns to face the "old men" in the house. They've come to grieve with and support the family, but the speaker finds their attention "embarrass[ing]." This seems like fairly standard teenage angst: the speaker doesn't like being the center of attention. But it also reflects the deeply personal nature of grief. The speaker seems to resent the "old men" for treating this tragedy as an obligation, for taking up space in the house during a difficult time, and for using stock phrases that aren't really comforting, like "sorry for [your] trouble." The speaker craves a more authentic expression of grief—something more like what his father demonstrates, crying on the porch.

These lines continue—and break from—the formal pattern established in the poem's first two stanzas. Like the poem's first two stanzas, lines 7-9 form a tercet. Like the poem's earlier lines, these move in and out of iambic pentameter. And they flirt with rhyme: "pram" and "hand" share an assonant /a/ sound, a shared sound that makes it feel like these lines—almost—rhyme. (It helps that the /m/ of "pram" and the /nd/ of "hand" are pretty similar).

However, the speaker uses enjambment in a new way here: while lines 4-6 were all end-stopped, lines 7-9 are all enjambed. The speaker even enjambs lines across two stanzas. Lines 4-6 suggested that the speaker was laying out a pattern, establishing an expectation: that the poem would be mostly end-stopped, with a few enjambments here and there. But as soon as he establishes that expectation, the speaker suddenly

switches and starts using a lot of enjambment.

This reflects the speaker's embarrassment: he seems to want to speed through this awkward scene and get to something more comforting. But it also reflects the speaker's swirling, powerful emotions: though his poem appears composed on its surface, its shifting patterns of enjambment and end-stop suggest that he is struggling, trying (and failing) to keep the poem organized.

LINES 11-13

Whispers informed strangers ...
... angry tearless sighs.

In lines 11-13, the speaker continues to describe the scene inside the house. He starts by noting that people whisper about him as he comes in, explaining that he's the oldest child, away at boarding school. This is an interesting detail. It suggests that many of the people in the house don't know the family very well—they haven't met the speaker before, they don't know who he is. This is not an intimate gathering of close family and friends, but a public occasion with lots of strangers in the house.

In the midst of this public event, however, the speaker and his mother do manage to share a moment of intimacy and comfort: she holds the speaker's hand. The alliterative /h/ sounds in lines 12 and 13 underline the intimacy of this gesture: "...as my mother held my hand / in hers." The /h/ sounds wrap around each other, like held hands.

Like the speaker's father, his mother has a surprising reaction to the tragedy—surprising in relation to traditional expectations around gender and grief. Instead of weeping, as she might have been expected to do, she "coughed out angry tearless sighs." She is angry, full of bitterness—but, the speaker specifies, she is "tearless." Like the father, tragedy leads her to break traditional gender roles. And she does so in public, with strangers watching her. Yet no one censures her or tries to get her to perform her social role in a more traditional way. Even though the society in which the poem is set is conservative and restrictive, it allows people to break tradition when faced with tragedy.

These lines continue the poem's formal pattern: they are part of two unrhymed tercets and written in something roughly like iambic pentameter. After the end-stop in line 11, line 12 is enjambed, continuing the rushing, anxious feel of the previous stanza. The poem's form continues to register the speaker's discomfort—and suggests that, no matter how much time has passed, he's still deeply affected by this tragedy.

LINES 14-15

At ten o'clock ...
... by the nurses.

In lines 14-15, the speaker describes a "corpse" arriving at the house, though he still hasn't clarified *whose* corpse it is. The

corpse arrives in an ambulance. It has been "stanched and bandaged by the nurses." In other words, the nurses have done their best to clean up the corpse and to treat its injuries. There's something tender about this, the way the nurses take care of the body, even after it's dead. Of course such treatment is ineffective; they can't save the "corpse." The speaker subtly emphasizes this through the use of assonance in line 15: while "stanched" and "bandaged" share an assonant /a/ sound, the word "corpse" has a totally different sound to it. It's cut off, sonically, from the nurses' attempts to heal and treat it.

Like the previous lines, lines 14-15 are part of a tercet, or three-line stanza. They flirt with meter. For example, line 14 is a good line of iambic pentameter:

At **ten** | o'**clock** | the **am**- | bu**lance** | a**rrived**

But line 15 swerves out of the meter. The speaker's continued struggles with meter suggest that he is having trouble controlling himself: that the composure of the poem disguises deeper emotional turbulence. And, as often happens in the poem, the speaker flirts with rhyme here. There's an assonant /i/ sound in "sighs" and "arrived." It feels like the poem is almost in rhyme, but the speaker can't quite control himself—or his poem—enough to maintain a consistent rhyme scheme.

LINES 16-18

Next morning I ...
... in six weeks.

In lines 16-18, the speaker jumps forward in time to the next morning. Once all the strangers have left the house, the speaker goes up "into the room" where the corpse has been laid out in a coffin. The bedside is surrounded with snowdrops and candles. Snowdrops are early blooming white flowers. Culturally, snowdrops serve as symbols for rebirth and resurrection—the hope that the "corpse" might be reborn in Heaven. And the candles, which have a similar meaning, also symbolize Catholic religious rituals more generally—rituals designed to console grieving families.

The speaker notes that these symbols "soothed the bedside"—but doesn't say anything about them soothing himself or his family. In other words, the speaker subtly suggests that these traditional rituals and symbols, designed to console the grieving, aren't working—that the tragedy his family has endured is too powerful for these symbols. The caesura in line 16 that separates "Snowdrops" subtly reinforces this sense: because the snowdrops are separate from the rest of the line, they seem to belong to a different world from the speaker. In this way, the speaker suggests that grief calls into question the traditions and beliefs through which people try to make sense of the world. Indeed, it raises the question of whether the world itself is just or logical.

In lines 17-18, the speaker describes seeing "him"—the

corpse—for "the first time in six weeks." The speaker never tells the reader exactly who the corpse is. But the poem is autobiographical—the corpse is Heaney's younger brother. This fact could also be inferred from the events of the poem, in which the speaker's family has clearly lost someone close. These lines are important because they set up the rest of the poem. In the final lines, the speaker will simply look at his brother's body and reflect on it.

Like the previous stanzas, lines 16-18 are written—loosely—in iambic pentameter, without any steady or regular rhyme scheme. The poem slides into and out of meter, suggesting an underlying emotional distress. And it remains fairly enjambed, further capturing this distress. But the stanzas remain in regular tercets, three lines apiece—giving the reader the sense that, despite this distress, the speaker retains a degree of composure.

LINES 18-22

Paler now, ...
... for every year.

"Mid-Term Break" ends with its speaker gazing at his dead brother's body, reflecting on it. He notes that his brother is "paler" than the last time he saw him, but that he also has a "poppy bruise" on his forehead. Poppies have bright red flowers, so this is a metaphor for the bright red bruise against the brother's pale skin. It's surprising that the speaker uses metaphor here: this is the first one in the poem. The speaker has generally avoided figurative language, trying to describe the tragedy in plain, straightforward language. But looking at his brother's body is so upsetting that he has to use metaphor to describe it.

And, in line 20, he uses simile as well. He describes his brother lying in his coffin, "the four-foot box," as if he were lying "in his cot," his small, child's-sized bed. It looks like the brother is simply asleep, lying in his bed. The simile expresses the speaker's instinctual hope: he wants his brother to be sleeping, instead of being dead. As the speaker confronts his brother's body, he finds himself unable to describe it directly. Instead, he turns to figurative language—metaphors and similes—that express his deep hope that the tragedy might disappear.

However, the sound of this line undercuts that hope. The speaker uses harsh consonant and alliterative /p/, /r/, and /t/ sounds in lines 18-19:

Pale**r** now,
Wea**r**ing a **p**o**pp**y **b**ruise on his lef**t t**emple

These harsh sounds echo the violence of the accident that killed the speaker's brother, violence that he can't simply wish away.

In line 21, the speaker notes that his brother doesn't have any "gaudy scars"—any bright or obvious injuries. Instead, the car

that struck him "knocked him clear." In other words, the force of the collision knocked him out of the way, so he didn't get caught up under the car's tires. This line returns to the direct, unpretentious language that the speaker has used throughout—almost as though the speaker has regained his composure, after the brief burst of metaphor and simile in the previous two lines.

But then something strange happens. Instead of continuing the poem's carefully organized pattern of three-line stanzas, the poem's final line is all by itself, a single-line stanza. This break in the poem's form suggests that the composure the speaker has struggled to maintain throughout the poem has fully broken down. And this break comes at a key moment in the poem. The speaker returns to the coffin in which his brother lies, meditating on its size. His brother was only four years old when he was killed, so his coffin is only four feet long.

The speaker starts by simply noting how short the coffin is: "a four-foot box." Then, there's a caesura in the middle of the line. In this brief pause, one can almost hear the speaker's mind working, reflecting on the meaning of the short coffin. He realizes that there's one "foot" of coffin "for every year" his brother lived. The repetition of the word "foot"—an instance of the poetic device diacope—emphasizes the connection between the two halves of the line. In other words, the brother's coffin is so short because his life was cut short: it represents the tragic brevity of his life.

"Mid-Term Break" has flirted with rhyme—using assonance to make it sound like the poem almost rhymes. But lines 21 and 22 have the poem's first perfect rhyme: between "clear" and "year." Rhyme often suggests closure, a sense of an ending—and this one does too, emphasizing the way the brother's life has been closed off by the accident. But the speaker doesn't experience this closure or share in it. The rhyme thus subtly suggests that if there's any closure in the poem, it's only for the dead. The living have to live with the tragedy, without relief.

SYMBOLS

BELLS

"Mid-Term Break" is not a very symbolic poem: the speaker prefers to describe the days after his brother's death in direct, unadorned language. But he does use a powerful and important symbol right at the start of the poem: "bells." In the poem, these bells represent death and burial.

Literally speaking, these are the bells that ring to mark when classes start and end at the speaker's school. But the "bells" also have a symbolic function. Bells are an important part of church services; in particular, churches will often ring bells to mark funerals. There's a specific word that's often used to describe these bells, a word that the speaker himself uses—a

funeral bell is often described as "knelling."

In other words, the bells at his school sound like funeral bells. And that makes the bells themselves symbolic: they symbolize death and burial, the end of life. In other words, the speaker's grief manifests itself in the way he remembers the ordinary sounds around him: they take on extra meaning, alongside their usual role in day-to-day life.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "bells"

SNOWDROPS

Snowdrops are white flowers. They are usually the first flowers to bloom, and for this reason they often symbolize hope and rebirth. The blossoms of snowdrops come out right as winter is ending and spring's beginning. (Hence their name: they look like the snow that's often on the ground as they first bloom.) The flowers are thus a good sign that spring is right around the corner. This is the root of their symbolic meaning: since winter is often associated with death and spring with rebirth, the flowers thus symbolize the possibility of resurrection, renewal, hope.

They are religious or spiritual symbols in the poem—they suggest that death isn't the end for the speaker's brother, that he might hope for another life in Heaven. This symbol of hope and rebirth doesn't seem particularly convincing to the speaker, however. He notes that they "soothed the bedside"—but not, significantly, the people gathered at the bedside to mourn his brother's death. In other words, the speaker invokes this religious symbol in part to show that religion isn't comforting him in his grief.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 16:** "Snowdrops"

CANDLES

In line 17, the speaker notes that there are "candles" at the "bedside" where his brother's body lies. In addition to being actual candles, these candles are also symbolic. They symbolize religious rituals—and the comfort and reassurance those religious rituals often bring.

Candles are an important part of Catholic religious rituals; Catholics often light candles in memory of the dead. That comfort doesn't seem to be working very well for the speaker. Even though there are flowers and "candles" at the "bedside," he doesn't personally find them soothing: instead, they "soothed the bedside." In other words, the speaker invokes the "candles" in part to show that his grief is so serious that even religion doesn't make him feel better.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 17:** "candles"

✂ POETIC DEVICES

END-STOPPED LINE

Although "Mid-Term Break" uses both enjambment and end-stop, it does not follow a clear pattern in doing so. Instead, the poem tends to switch unpredictably between the two. For instance, lines 4-6 ("In the porch ... a hard blow.") are all end-stopped. As a result, each of these lines feels definite, decisive. The end-stops encourage the reader to pause and reflect on the line itself before moving on to the next line. These lines are slow and deliberate. Though they describe a difficult, tragic scene, the speaker remains in control, composed.

But the next stanza, lines 7-9, is all enjambed. Just when the reader feels like the poem is establishing a pattern, the speaker switches things up. These lines feel rushed: the reader speeds down the page through each enjambment. The speaker's composure and control seem to have suddenly evaporated. These unexpected shifts happen throughout the poem. Establishing a pattern, then breaking it, moving between heavily enjambed and heavily end-stopped sections, the speaker seems to deal with unstable emotions. He is composed and controlled in one moment, chaotic in the next.

In this sense, the poem's end-stops and enjambments reflect the speaker's emotions as he reflects on his brother's tragic death. The death was many years ago, so the speaker can reflect on it with composure and control. However, sometimes the full force of the tragedy returns and the speaker loses his composure—despite the intervening years.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "close."
- **Line 3:** "home."
- **Line 4:** "crying—"
- **Line 5:** "stride—"
- **Line 6:** "blow."
- **Line 10:** "trouble.'"
- **Line 11:** "eldest,"
- **Line 13:** "sighs."
- **Line 15:** "nurses."
- **Line 18:** "now,"
- **Line 19:** "temple,"
- **Line 20:** "cot."
- **Line 21:** "clear."
- **Line 22:** "year."

ENJAMBMENT

As with end-stop, "Mid-Term Break" uses enjambment often, but not in any regular pattern. This variability captures the way the speaker shuttles between composure and sadness.

For instance, the first line of the poem is enjambed, but the speaker doesn't use enjambment again until line 7—lines 2-6 ("Counting bells ... a hard blow.") are all end-stopped. These end-stopped lines feel composed, controlled. This might suggest to the reader that the poem isn't going to use enjambment often, and that the speaker has achieved some level of peace in the years since his brother's death. But then lines 7, 8, and 9 are all enjambed: the speaker's composure seems to evaporate. The poem establishes a pattern, an expectation on the part of its readers, and then it breaks that pattern.

> ... and rocked the **pram**
> **When** I came in, and I was **embarrassed**
> **By** old men ...

Lines 7-9 are the most consistently enjambed in the poem, but enjambment continues to appear intermittently throughout (until the last four lines, which are all end-stopped). The poem often even enjambs lines across stanzas. For instance, line 12 is enjambed, even though it's the end of a stanza:

> ... as my mother held my **hand**
>
> **In** hers ...

This is unusual and disruptive: poets often try to keep their sentences within the boundaries of a stanza. Here, the speaker's emotions overflow the stanza. This suggests that he may not be as composed as he seems at first, not quite as in control of his emotions. In this sense, enjambment serves to register the sudden, unexpected shifts in the speaker's emotions.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "bay / Counting"
- **Lines 7-8:** "pram / When"
- **Lines 8-9:** "embarrassed / By"
- **Lines 9-10:** "hand / And"
- **Lines 12-13:** "hand / In"
- **Lines 14-15:** "arrived / With"
- **Lines 16-17:** "Snowdrops / And"
- **Lines 17-18:** "him / For"

CAESURA

"Mid-Term Break" contains several significant caesuras—caesuras that amplify the larger issues with which

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the poem wrestles. For instance, take a look at the caesura in line 16:

> Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops

Up until the caesura, line 16 describes a ritual action—something people do while they're grieving: visiting the body. The caesura separates the "Snowdrops" from this act. Because of the caesura, the "Snowdrops" don't quite seem to belong to the world of the poem; amid all the descriptions of human affairs, these lyrically named flowers suddenly appear. They seem separate and special, like visitors from another realm. In this way, the caesura underlines the flowers' symbolic association with Heaven, as if they are examples of the better place that awaits the brother. (Though whether the speaker *actually* believes in Heaven isn't clear.)

There's also an important caesura in the poem's final line:

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

In this line, the speaker makes a grim comparison. He notes that his brother's coffin is unusually small, only four feet long. And then he remembers that his brother was only four years old when he died—so there's one foot of coffin for each year of his brother's life. The caesura creates a moment of pause and reflection in the line. In that pause, the reader can feel the speaker's mind working, slowly reflecting on the similarities between the coffin and his brother's life. The poem's caesuras thus reflect the speaker's thinking, and amplify the conflicts about hope, grief, and religion that run through the poem.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "in, and"
- **Line 12:** "school, as"
- **Line 15:** "corpse, stanched"
- **Line 16:** "room. Snowdrops"
- **Line 17:** "bedside; I"
- **Line 18:** "weeks. Paler"
- **Line 21:** "scars, the"
- **Line 22:** "box, a"

ALLITERATION

"Mid-Term Break" doesn't use a lot of alliteration. This makes a certain amount of sense: alliteration can often make a poem feel literary or artificial. That can be a good thing in a poem, but this particular poem isn't interested in feeling literary. Instead, the speaker is trying to describe the days after his brother's death with honesty and directness, capturing the unpretentious ways that people in his hometown talk, live, and deal with grief. If the poem were overly alliterative, it would lose its connection with these people and the way they talk. So the speaker writes a relatively unadorned, unfussy poem.

But that doesn't mean the speaker excludes alliteration altogether: he just uses it sparingly, saving it for important and significant moments in the poem. For instance, take a look at the alliterative /h/ sound that appears in lines 12-13: "... my mother held my hand / in hers." The repeated /h/ sounds wrap around each other: they feel like hands holding each other. In other words, there's something intimate and comforting about this alliteration: it mimics the feeling of having one's hand held.

Elsewhere, the alliteration functions differently, as in the /p/ sound in lines 18-19: "Paler now, / Wearing a poppy bruise." A "poppy" is red, while a pale person is usually very white. Here the alliteration emphasizes the difference between the two colors—and makes the red bruise on the speaker's brother's forehead seem all the more shocking.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "c," "b"
- **Line 2:** "C," "b," "c," "l," "c," "l"
- **Line 3:** "cl"
- **Line 4:** "m," "m"
- **Line 5:** "H," "h"
- **Line 12:** "A," "a," "a," "m," "m," "h," "m," "h"
- **Line 13:** "h," "a"
- **Line 14:** "A," "a," "a"
- **Line 15:** "b," "b"
- **Line 16:** "S"
- **Line 17:** "s," "s"
- **Line 18:** "F," "f," "s," "P"
- **Line 19:** "p," "b," "h," "l"
- **Line 20:** "H," "l," "f," "f"
- **Line 22:** "f," "f," "f," "f"

ASSONANCE

"Mid-Term Break" is an unpretentious, direct poem: it tries to capture the rhythms of people's real speech, without making it seem overly literary. At the same time, the poem uses fairly regular assonance to subtly elevate certain moments that really matter.

One of these moments appears in line 15, with its strong /a/ sound: "stanched and bandaged by the nurses." The /a/ sounds link together the words and the actions they represent: stopping the blood flow and bandaging the wounds. However, there is no such sonic link with the word "corpse," which comes right before these words. By severing this link, the poem suggests that these actions ultimately can't help "the corpse." The emergence of this assonance—and its relative isolation from the word "corpse"—suggests the futility of medicine, its inability to help the speaker's brother.

The speaker also often uses assonance at the ends of some lines to create the feeling that the lines almost rhyme. Note for instance the assonant /i/ sounds that bind together "crying" and

"stride" in lines 4-5 and "sighs" and "arrived" in lines 13-14. These assonances make it feel like the poem is flirting with rhyme. In other words, it feels like the poem *could* be in rhyme, but the speaker doesn't quite have the necessary composure or control over himself to generate a solid, steady [rhyme scheme](#). These repeated sounds are far enough away from each other they might normally be looked over. However, because they appear at the ends of lines, they suggest rhymes that might otherwise be lost. For this reason, we've highlighted such syllables as part of the poem's assonance.

The poem's assonance—whether at key moments in each line or as almost-rhymes—thus dramatizes the unsteady control the speaker has over himself as he remembers the days after his brother's death.

> **Where Assonance appears in the poem:**
>
> - **Line 2:** "e," "e," "o"
> - **Line 3:** "o," "o," "o"
> - **Line 4:** "I," "y," "y"
> - **Line 5:** "a," "a," "i," "i"
> - **Line 6:** "i," "i," "i," "i," "a," "a"
> - **Line 7:** "a," "au," "a," "a"
> - **Line 8:** "I," "a," "I," "a"
> - **Line 9:** "a," "a"
> - **Line 11:** "i," "i"
> - **Line 12:** "a," "a," "a"
> - **Line 13:** "a," "a," "i"
> - **Line 14:** "A," "a," "i"
> - **Line 15:** "a," "a," "a"
> - **Line 16:** "o," "oo"
> - **Line 17:** "A," "a," "oo," "i," "I"
> - **Line 18:** "i," "i"
> - **Line 19:** "o," "o," "e," "e"
> - **Line 20:** "o," "i," "i," "o"
> - **Line 21:** "au," "o"
> - **Line 22:** "ou," "oo," "oo," "o," "y," "ea"

CONSONANCE

The speaker of "Mid-Term Break" uses a lot of [consonance](#). The poem is about grief and despair; it depicts a world in which traditional comforts, like religion, no longer console. As such, it uses a lot of harsh consonant sounds to convey the harshness of the world the poem describes—and the despair that the speaker and his family feel. The poem bristles with tough, harsh sounds: it is ragged and rough as the people it describes.

For instance, note the many hard /k/ and /b/ sounds of the first two lines. These percussive sounds are like harsh school bells themselves relentlessly echoing throughout the line, with the many lolling /l/ sounds slowing things down and adding to the speaker's anxiety and frustration as he waits to be collected from school:

> ... college sick bay
> Counting bells knelling classes to a close.

Later, when describing his brother's body, the speaker uses a series of popping /p/ sounds. One can see these sounds in lines 18-19:

> ... Paler now,
> Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple

The speaker is describing a body that has been badly damaged, hit by a car and killed. The line itself feels damaged, punctured, with all these harsh, sharp sounds cutting through it. In other words, the sound of the line takes on the characteristics of the corpse it describes: it is as badly wounded as that corpse. Consonance thus helps convey the violence of the tragedy—and the despair the speaker feels as a result of it.

> **Where Consonance appears in the poem:**
>
> - **Line 1:** "s," "ll," "n," "n," "c," "ll," "s," "ck," "b"
> - **Line 2:** "C," "n," "b," "ll," "s," "kn," "ll," "cl," "ss," "s," "cl," "s"
> - **Line 3:** "t," "t," "cl," "r," "r," "r," "m," "m"
> - **Line 4:** "m," "m," "th," "r," "r"
> - **Line 5:** "H," "h," "n," "n," "r," "n," "h," "s," "r," "d"
> - **Line 6:** "d," "b," "w"
> - **Line 7:** "b," "b," "c," "d," "nd," "d," "nd," "r," "ck," "d," "r," "m"
> - **Line 8:** "c," "m," "n," "n," "m"
> - **Line 9:** "d," "m," "n," "nd," "m," "nd"
> - **Line 10:** "t," "rr," "t," "r"
> - **Line 11:** "rs," "r," "s," "t," "r," "rs," "s," "s," "t"
> - **Line 12:** "m," "m," "h," "d," "m," "h," "d"
> - **Line 13:** "h," "r," "s," "t," "r," "t," "r," "ss," "s," "s"
> - **Line 14:** "t," "t," "rr"
> - **Line 15:** "r," "s," "s," "n," "d," "nd," "b," "nd," "d," "b"
> - **Line 16:** "S," "d," "s"
> - **Line 17:** "nd," "nd," "s," "s," "d," "e," "s," "d," "s"
> - **Line 18:** "F," "r," "f," "r," "st," "t," "s," "x," "s," "P"
> - **Line 19:** "p," "pp," "l," "t," "p," "l"
> - **Line 20:** "l," "f," "r," "f," "b," "x," "c"
> - **Line 21:** "c," "r," "m," "r," "ck," "m," "c"
> - **Line 22:** "f," "r," "f," "t," "f," "t," "f," "r," "r," "y," "y," "r"

SIMILE

In "Mid-Term Break," there is one instance of [simile](#). The speaker compares his brother's "four-foot box," or coffin, to the "cot," or small bed the brother used to sleep in.

"Mid-Term Break" is a direct, unpretentious poem. It tries to capture the language that people really use in the speaker's village. The speaker wants to describe the way they really live. He thus mostly avoids using [metaphor](#) and simile: after all, metaphor and simile take one thing and compare it to something else. The speaker doesn't want to do that. he wants

to describe life in his village on its own terms, without bringing in extraneous ideas or materials. Avoiding metaphor and simile helps the poem feel more honest—more direct in its portrayal of the speaker's village, his family, and their grief.

However, again, the speaker does use simile once in the poem, in line 20: "He lay in the four-foot box as in his cot." Here, the speaker is describing his brother: the way he looks as he lies in his coffin. To the speaker, it looks like he's sleeping, just lying on the small bed—or "cot"—where he usually sleeps. As the speaker explains in the next line, his brother doesn't have any "gaudy scars." His body is more or less unmarked by the accident that killed him. So it would be very possible to think that the brother's just sleeping—even though the speaker knows he isn't.

The simile thus suggests that the speaker is having a hard time letting go, accepting that his brother is dead—understandably enough. He wants his brother to be just sleeping, not dead. And he momentarily indulges in this fantasy. The simile thus takes the speaker out of the cruel reality that the poem describes, allows him to imagine, briefly, a better world: a world in which his brother is still alive.

> **Where Simile appears in the poem:**
> - **Line 20:** "He lay in the four-foot box as in his cot."

METAPHOR

In "Mid-Term Break," the speaker largely avoids using figurative language (symbols, metaphors, and similes). He wants to describe his brother's tragic death—and his family's grief—as directly as possible, without bringing in a lot of complicated, unnecessary images and difficult language. But the speaker does indulge in metaphor once, at a key moment in the poem. When he finally goes upstairs to see his brother's body ("for the first time in six weeks"), the speaker says that his brother is "wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple." A poppy is a bright red flower. So the speaker is saying that his brother has a bright, red bruise on his forehead—presumably from getting hit by the car. To the speaker, the bruise looks like a red flower.

This is a surprising image: after all, poppies have very beautiful flowers. And the bruise on the speaker's brother's forehead isn't beautiful at all—it's evidence of a violent injury. The speaker is usually very direct about what he sees: he doesn't dress things up or make the tragedy seem more bearable than it actually is. So this metaphor is uncharacteristic. It suggests that even the speaker, as clear-eyed and direct as he is, has to find some evidence of beauty to make this moment more bearable. The delicacy of a poppy flower mirrors the delicacy of the speaker's brother. As meager as this image is, it represents the poem's only explicit attempt to *create* beauty from grief. After this moment, the poem returns its plainspoken observations.

> **Where Metaphor appears in the poem:**
> - **Line 19:** "Wearing a poppy bruise"

POLYSYNDETON

The speaker of "Mid-Term Break" uses polysyndeton in line 7, when he describes a baby's reaction to him returning from school:

> The baby cooed **and** laughed **and** rocked the pram

This is a touching and sad image: the baby (probably the speaker's sibling) doesn't understand that something tragic has happened, so it gets excited when it sees the speaker. The use of polysyndeton imitates the baby's excitement: as the baby rocks back and forth in its carriage, the line also rocks rhythmically. Indeed, this one of the most rhythmically regular lines in the poem, falling into perfect iambs:

> The **ba-** | by **cooed** | and **laughed** | and **rocked** | the **pram**

In the regular alternation between stressed and unstressed syllables, one feels the baby shifting back and forth in its carriage.

The poem often diverges from a strict iambic rhythm. These metrical variations register the speaker's underlying distress: he doesn't have the composure to keep the poem fully under control, metrically. The baby, with its spontaneous joy, seems to provide a little bit of respite and relief: enough that the speaker, imitating the baby's movements, can briefly bring the line into metrical regularity. The line's polysyndeton thus emphasizes the baby's effect on the speaker: offering him a brief glimpse of joy in an otherwise tragic moment.

> **Where Polysyndeton appears in the poem:**
> - **Line 7:** "The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram"

DIACOPE

"Mid-Term Break" generally avoids using elaborate, repetitive poetic devices like parallelism or anaphora: they just don't fit with its direct, unpretentious documentation of tragedy and its aftermath. But the speaker of "Mid-Term Break" does use diacope in the poem's final stanza and line: "He lay in the **four-foot box** as in his cot ... A **four-foot box**, a **foot** for every year." (Note also that the second "for" here is a homonym and adds to the diacope's sonic effect, even though "for" has a different meaning than "four.") In this line, the speaker is looking at his brother's coffin. Because his brother was a child—only four years old—when he died, the coffin is unusually short, only four

feet long. So the speaker reflects that each foot of the coffin's length corresponds to a year of his brother's life. This is a powerful comparison: in the same way that the coffin is unnaturally short, so too has his brother's life been cut short unexpectedly.

The use of diacope helps underline and reinforce this connection. The line is split in half by a [caesura](). In this pause, the speaker's mind seems to be working, thinking about the coffin. After the pause, the speaker repeats a key word from earlier in the line, "foot." This repetition emphasizes the relationship between the coffin and the speaker's brother's abbreviated life. It also suggests that the speaker is stuck on this fact: he can't stop thinking about the coffin. Even after a pause for reflection, he's still thinking about it. This use of diacope thus underlines a moment of emotional intensity: when the speaker's grief overpowers him and expresses itself in the poem's language.

> **Where Diacope appears in the poem:**
> - **Line 20:** "four-foot box"
> - **Line 22:** "A four-foot box, a foot for every year."

📑 VOCABULARY

College (Line 1) - A boarding school, for high-school aged students.

Sick Bay (Line 1) - The nurse's office: a place where sick—or, in this case, grieving—students go to rest.

Knelling (Line 2) - Ringing, tolling. The word is usually used to describe church bells—especially when they're ringing for a funeral.

In His Stride (Line 5) - Without weeping. This phrase is idiomatic; it means that someone doesn't let challenges or bad news interrupt their normal composure—like someone who keeps striding no matter what gets in their way. In other words, the speaker's father usually doesn't get too emotional at funerals.

Pram (Line 7) - A baby carriage or stroller.

Eldest (Line 11) - The oldest. The speaker is the oldest child of several.

Stanched (Line 15) - To stop the flow of blood from a wound.

Snowdrops (Line 16) - Small white flowers—often the first flowers to bloom as winter ends. They symbolize rebirth.

Poppy (Line 19) - Red, like the color of a poppy's flower. In other words, the child has a dark, red bruise on his forehead.

Temple (Line 19) - The forehead.

Four-foot box (Line 20, Line 22) - A coffin. Because the dead person is a child, the coffin is unusually small.

Gaudy (Line 21) - Bright or obvious.

Bumper (Line 21) - The bumper of a car: a piece of metal attached to the front and rear of the car, designed to absorb the shock of a minor collision.

⏱ FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Mid-Term Break" might best be thought of as an [elegy](), but that doesn't mean it follows a strict form (unlike, say, the [sonnet]()). For its first 21 lines, it's written in [tercets](), or three-line [stanzas](). Though few of its lines are metrically regular, it often comes close to being in [iambic]() [pentameter]()—indeed, one might say it flirts with being in [meter](). This gives the poem a sense of regularity and organization.

Though the poem describes a tragedy—the shattering event of a young sibling's death—it mostly maintains a sense of composure. There are irregularities here and there, moments where the meter breaks down, but the regular pattern of the stanzas suggests that the speaker has achieved some closure. He's talking about something that happened a long time ago. It's tragic, but he's also had time to process his feelings. He's reflecting on this event, rather than experiencing it directly. At least, that's the way it feels until the poem's last line.

The poem's formal regularity breaks down in its last line. Although all the other stanzas in the poem have been three lines long, the last line is its own stanza. It almost feels like the speaker *started* to write another stanza and then couldn't continue. The memory of brother's coffin takes him right back to the tragedy, the full grief he felt right after it happened. And this happens with so much intensity that the speaker can't keep going. The poem's form thus reflects both the speaker's composure as well as the power of his grief—a power which knocks the poem off its tracks.

METER

"Mid-Term Break" is—sort of—written in [iambic]() [pentameter](). Iambic pentameter follows a da **DUM** [rhythm](), with five of these poetic [feet]() in each line. One can hear this rhythm in line 7:

> The **ba-** | by **cooed** | and **laughed** | and **rocked** | the **pram**

Here, the iambic rhythm of the line imitates the baby rocking back and forth in its carriage.

However, more often than not, the poem fails to uphold this rhythm, introducing extra syllables or metrical variations. For example, line 2 has the right number of syllables for a line of iambic pentameter. But its ten syllables don't quite follow the usual rhythm:

Count*ing* | **bells knel**- | ling **clas**- | ses to | a **close**

The line starts with a [trochee](#) (**DUM** da), followed by a [spondee](#) (**DUM DUM**). Then it has an iamb, an arguable [pyrrhic](#) (da da), and another iamb. Of the line's five feet, only two of them are iambs.

Or look at line 5 which expands to 12 syllables:

He had | al**ways** | ta**ken** | fu**ner**- | als **in** | his **stride**

The last two feet are iambic, but the first four are all trochees. The strong rhythm of these trochees, along with the line's two extra syllables, captures the father's effort to come to terms with the loss of his son.

The poem thus flirts with meter—it's almost metrical, but not quite. The meter of the poem is often a measure of control and composure: a poem in good meter suggests a speaker who's in control of their poem. The speaker of "Mid-Term Break" seems almost composed, almost under control. Yet his grief is still raw, even though he's had time to process it. That continued rawness shows in the rough edges of the poem—its uneven, imprecise meter.

RHYME SCHEME

"Mid-Term Break" does not have a [rhyme scheme](#). Most of its lines are technically [unrhymed](#), though many flirt with rhyme, using [assonance](#) to connect words in a rhyme-like way.

For instance, assonance connects words like "cl*o*se" and "h*o*me" in the first stanza via the long /o/ sound. It connects "cr*y*ing" and "str*i*de" in the second stanza as well as "s*i*ghs" and "arr*i*ved" in the fifth stanza with their assonant /i/ sounds. It also connects "pr*a*m" and "h*a*nd" in the third stanza with the /a/ sound.

One can imagine why the speaker doesn't want to use full-out rhyme: rhyme can convey a sense of closure. It tends to wrap things up, to make them feel complete and finished. But this is a poem about grief that suggests that grief *doesn't* have a neat ending, it doesn't ever really resolve itself. So a regular rhyme scheme would be inappropriate for the poem and its depiction of grief. Instead, the poem's suggestive use of assonance captures how the act of grieving is never fully complete.

However, the poem does have one [perfect rhyme](#) in a surprising place: the final two lines of the poem rhyme "clear" with "year." The rhyme draws a strong connection between the "bumper" that "knocked" the speaker's brother "clear" and the "four-foot box" where he now lies. In other words, it matter-of-factly emphasizes that the speaker's brother is in a coffin because he got hit by a car.

The rhyme also suggests a kind of closure, contrary to the rest of the poem which has avoided closure. Here, it marks the sudden end of the brother's life. But the speaker doesn't share

in that closure, doesn't find it comforting and reassuring. The poem's single rhyme thus hints that only the dead experience closure; the living simply have to live with grief.

👤💬 SPEAKER

The speaker of "Mid-Term Break" is someone in high school whose brother has been hit and killed by a car. The poem is autobiographical, based on a real incident in Seamus Heaney's life. So it's fair to say that the speaker of the poem is Heaney himself, even though the speaker never explicitly acknowledges who he is. The speaker reflects on his brother's tragic death and the way his family and his community responded to that death. Indeed, the speaker spends the poem describing the time *after* his brother died: he has little to say about the accident itself. His focus is on the living, how they cope—or fail to cope—with tragedy.

The speaker has a little bit of distance from the tragedy: he's not narrating the poem as it occurs, but reflecting on it—thinking about something that happened years ago. (In fact, the poem was first published in 1966, thirteen years after Heaney's brother was killed.) This gives the speaker a certain amount of composure: although he's discussing something tragic, disturbing, and senseless, he's able to describe the days after the tragedy with clarity and composure. This composure is reflected in the poem's organized form.

But that clarity and composure break down at the end of the poem—and the poem's form breaks down too, switching from three line stanzas to a single, isolated line as the poem ends. When the speaker thinks too hard about this tragedy, he loses his distance from it, so that the tragedy remains as raw as it was when it happened.

🖼 SETTING

As "Mid-Term Break" opens, it's set in a boarding school—a "college"—in Northern Ireland. The speaker waits in the "sick bay," or nurse's office, listening to the college's bells ringing to mark the beginning and end of classes. Then his "neighbours" show up and drive him home, to a village. Most of the poem takes place in this village—more specifically, in the speaker's house in the village, with members of the community dropping by to pay their respects to the speaker and his family. So the setting of the poem is very intimate and specific: a single house in Northern Ireland.

But it's also important to think about the poem's setting more generally. The poem is set in Northern Ireland in the 1950s, and the culture of that place at that time deeply shape the poem. It's reflected in the way that people respond to tragedy. For many of the characters in the poem, like the "strangers" who gather in the house, grief feels like a social obligation: they come to the

house to pay their respects because they feel like they have to.

This culture also forms the background against which to understand the speaker's mother and father. They act in ways that break with the stereotypes and expectations that usually constrain men and women's behavior: instead of being stoic and tough, for example, the father bursts into tears. And instead of being weepy, the mother is full of rage.

The poem's setting is thus both physical and cultural. And its cultural backdrop helps the reader judge the way people behave in the poem: whether they're simply following social norms or rebelling against them as they process their grief.

ⓘ CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"Mid-Term Break" was written in the 1960s in Ireland. It is part of a group of poems that eventually became Seamus Heaney's book, *Death of a Naturalist*, published in 1966. A "Naturalist" is someone who studies nature. It's an old-fashioned term, used to describe 19th century gentlemen scientists, rather than contemporary researchers. The book helped to establish Heaney's reputation as one of the most important English-language poets in the second half of the 20th century—and, as a result, a poem like "Mid-Term Break" gives its readers a good sense of what Heaney's priorities are as a poet.

Unlike some earlier twentieth century poets, like T.S. Eliot, Heaney isn't much interested in elaborate, difficult language—or complicated symbols and metaphors. Instead, his writing is straightforward and direct. He describes real people and uses the language they themselves might use. One can imagine, for instance, that "Big Jim Evans" would really use a phrase like "hard blow." It's a simple, direct expression—unpretentious, but full of sympathy and understanding.

In this sense, one might describe Heaney's poetry as itself a kind of "naturalism." It emerges from a direct, careful study of real people: their language, their habits, their culture. And it offers its readers a window into their lives. Indeed, it presents their lives as worthy of attention. This, in itself, is an important and subtle argument. Irish people have often lived with cruel stereotypes about their intelligence and cultural achievement. Heaney's poem suggests that these people are worth paying attention to—that their lives and language are as valuable as other more traditional literary subjects.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Mid-Term Break" is about a family in Northern Ireland in the 1950s. Northern Ireland has a complicated and long history. Beginning in the 1600s, English settlers moved to Ireland and—in a series of violent conflicts—took control over the island. Some Irish people converted to Protestantism, largely in the north of the country. This was the religion of the English settlers, and the decision to convert aligned those Irish people with the English. But many remained Catholic, the religion of Ireland prior to the English conquest. (Heaney himself was Catholic, although his family was from Northern Ireland). By the twentieth century, Irish society was thus deeply divided between Protestants and Catholics. And it remained under English rule—which was often violent and repressive.

Religion was thus a key part of Irish life, no matter what side one found oneself on. And during the 1950s, when the poem was written, religion often dictated how people approached things like gender and grief. It structured people's social lives, their behavior, and their relationships. That historical context is important for understanding "Mid-Term Break." The poem itself describes a "break": a moment when such social standards break down. Because the death of a child is such a sharp blow, some of the people in the poem act in ways that defy the expected standards around gender and grief. In order to see this as an act of defiance, one must first understand the oppressive standards that usually governed their lives.

📚 MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Seamus Heaney's 10 Best Poems — A list of Heaney's 10 Best Poems from the Telegraph—offering a good introduction to his broader work. (https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/10276092/Seamus-Heaney-his-10-best-poems.html)

- Heaney Restrospective — A critical appraisal of the poet's life and work, from Naomi Schalit. (http://theconversation.com/seamus-heaney-the-death-of-a-naturalist-17707)

- Seamus Heaney's Life — A detailed biography from the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/seamus-heaney)

- Seamus Heaney Reads "Mid-Term Break" — The poet reads his own poem aloud for the Poetry Ireland Lunchtime Reading Series. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YgzE60gMW4)

- Heaney's Family on Life with the Poet — In an article for the Guardian Newspaper, Seamus Heaney's family reflect on life with Heaney. (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jun/30/seamus-heaney-family-ireland-icon-jet-sitter-jet-setter)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER SEAMUS HEANEY POEMS

- Blackberry-Picking
- Death of a Naturalist
- Digging

💬 HOW TO CITE

MLA

Altman, Toby. "*Mid-Term Break.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 1 Aug 2019. Web. 22 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Altman, Toby. "*Mid-Term Break.*" LitCharts LLC, August 1, 2019. Retrieved April 22, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/seamus-heaney/mid-term-break.