Rural Britain in Poems:

Understanding and Analysis

Aims and Objectives

- Aims
  - Understanding of 4 poems about the British countryside.
  - Analysis or 4 poems about the British countryside.
  - Research skills
  - Simple understanding of the concept of ‘The Death of the Author.’

- Objectives
  - Pupils will be able to show their understanding and analysis of the poems in written notes.
  - Pupils will be able to apply their understanding of the theory of ‘The Death of The Author’ to one of the poets and their poem, specified here.

Previous Learning and Notes for Parents and Students

- Previous learning:
  - Students should have an understanding of the poetic techniques: Word choice, imagery, contrast, tone, theme, symbolism.
- If the work and discussion takes you into other areas of learning that you think are relevant and interesting, follow that path.
- Trust yourself and your child.

Starter Activity

- A refresher:
  - Look up the definition of each technique
    - Word Choice
    - Imagery
    - Contrast
    - Tone
  - Note as many examples of each that you can think of.
  - Time yourself for 15 minutes, and explore your home, finding as many examples of the techniques used in magazines, books, leaflets, newspapers etc.
  - Now research examples of the techniques used in other POEMS.

The Death of the Author?

Task: read the following

From Cultural Reader Blog: ‘Roland Barthes's famous essay "The Death of the Author" (1967) is a meditation on the rules of author and reader as mediated by the text. Barthes's essential argument is that the author has no sovereignty over his own words (or images, sounds, etc.) that belong to the reader who interprets them. When we encounter a literary text, says Barthes, we need not ask ourselves what the author intended in his words but what the words themselves actually say. Text employ symbols which are deciphered by readers, and since function of the text is to be read, the author and process of writing is irrelevant.

"The death of the author" notion means that meaning is not something retrieved or discovered, having been there all the while, but rather something spontaneously generated in the process of reading a text, which is an active rather than passive action. Barthes does not intend to suggest that the death of the author lets any reader read any text any way he or she like (though others aside from Barthes perused this line of thought). What Barthes is suggesting is that reading always involves at least a little bit of writing or rewriting of the text's meaning.

Barthes's "The Death of the Author" is an attack on traditional literary criticism that focused too much on trying to retrace the author's intentions and original meaning in mind. Instead Barthes asks us to adopt a more text oriented approach that focuses on the interaction of the reader, not the writer, with it. This means that the text is much more open to interpretation, much more fluid in its meaning than previously thought.’

Task: Have a look at these

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9iMgtfp484

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGn9x4-Y_7A

‘Death of the Author’ continued...

Task: Summarise the ideas in this theory

Death of the author continued...

Let's have a look at Roland Barthes.
Task: Search online for:
'Roland Barthes's life'
'Roland Barthes's politics/political views'
Note your main findings:

Now put these ideas to one side for the time being.

England: ‘On a Lane in Spring’ - John Clare

Task: Read through the poem

A Little Lane, the brook runs close beside
And spangles in the sunshine while the fish glide swiftly by
And hedges leafing with the green spring tide
From out their greenery the old birds fly
And chirp and whistle in the morning sun
The pilewort glitters ‘neath the pale blue sky
The little robin has its nest begun

And grass green linnets round the bushes fly
How Mild the Spring Comes in; the daisy buds
Lift up their golden blossoms to the sky
How lovely are the pingles and the woods
Here a beetle runs; and there a fly
Rests on the Arum leaf in bottle green
And all the Spring in this Sweet lane is seen

Task: Listen to the poem set to music:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8m_k0UYKBE

Task: Listen to the poem read aloud:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAZAO40b3gI

Note down 3 observations on the difference between ‘reading’ the poem, ‘hearing’ the poem read, and ‘listening to the poem set to music’ (what is your immediate reaction to them?)

_____

_____

_____

John Clare, the Poet

Task: Search online for information on the poet, his life and his writings.
Search Criteria:
‘John Clare, poet’
‘The life of John Clare’
‘The writing of John Clare’
Now that you’ve read a little on his life and writing, add 2 search criteria of your own that is specific to Clare:
1...
2...

Findings:

Understanding the poem

Task: Look up any words you don't know. Note them and their definition

This is a descriptive nature poem.

Task: In your own words, what Clare describes

Analysing the poem

Word Choice:
The important thing about word choice is not only the meaning of the word but the connotations - other things we associate with that word.

The word choice of 'spangles means _____ and has connotations of _____
The word choice of 'sunshine' means and suggests _____

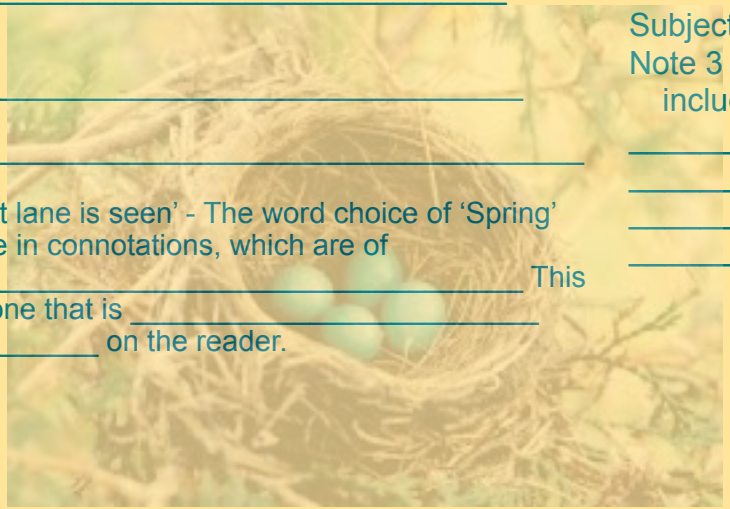
'green spring tide' -
_____

'chirp and whistle' -
_____

'glitters' -
_____

'Mild' - _____

'And all the Spring in this Sweet lane is seen' - The word choice of 'Spring' and 'Sweet' is overtly positive in connotations, which are of _____ This has the effect of creating a tone that is _____ and the overall effect is _____ on the reader.



Contrast:
'From out their greenery the old birds fly' - The contrast here is between _____ and _____
- This makes the reader think of
_____

Use of colour:
'the daisy buds
Lift up their golden blossoms to the sky'
The colours used here are _____
This has the effect of making us think of
_____
_____

Subject and content:
Note 3 references to living creatures. Analyse why he has included these and what you think the effect is.
_____
_____
_____
_____

Scotland: Winter-Time - Robert Louis Stevenson

Task: Read through the poem

Late lies the wintry sun a-bed,
A frosty, fiery sleepy-head;
Blinks but an hour or two; and then,
A blood-red orange, sets again.

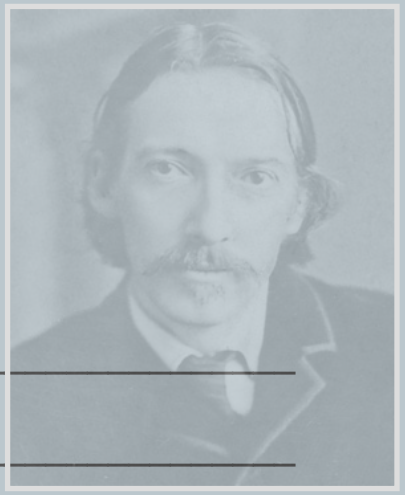
Before the stars have left the skies,
At morning in the dark I rise;
And shivering in my nakedness,
By the cold candle, bathe and dress.

Close by the jolly fire I sit
To warm my frozen bones a bit;
Or with a reindeer-sled, explore
The colder countries round the door.

When to go out, my nurse doth wrap
Me in my comforter and cap;
The cold wind burns my face, and blows
Its frosty pepper up my nose.

Black are my steps on silver sod;
Thick blows my frosty breath abroad;
And tree and house, and hill and lake,
Are frosted like a wedding-cake.

Robert Louis Stevenson, the Poet



Task: Search online for information on the poet, his life and his writings.
Search Criteria:
'Robert Louis Stevenson, poet and writer'
'The life of Robert Louis Stevenson'
'The writing of Robert Louis Stevenson'
Now that you've read a little on his life and writing, add 2 search criteria of your own that is specific to Stevenson:
1. ..
2. ..

Findings:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Understanding the poem

Summarise, in your own words:

The setting in terms of the **time of year** of the poem, using examples and quotes from the poem to explain.

Setting - Time of day

Summarise what the speaker does in stanzas 3 and 4, using examples and quotes from the poem.

Outline, in your own words, what the speaker sees, in the final stanza.

Analysing the poem

Word Choice:
The word choice of ‘A frosty, fiery sleepy-head;’ means _____. It has connotations of
_____

'To warm my frozen bones a bit;’ This word choice is a use of contrast because
_____

'Black are my steps on silver sod;’ This is also a use of contrast because
_____

Imagery:
The image of ‘Before the stars have left the skies’ conveys
_____
- We see this because the poet personifies
_____

‘Late lies the wintry sun a-bed,
Blinks but an hour or two’ _____
The poet describes the scene as, ‘Close by the jolly fire I sit’, Here he uses imagery to describe the fire because
_____
_____

‘The colder countries round the door.’ This use of imagery conveys that
_____
_____

‘The cold wind burns my face, and blows
Its frosty pepper up my nose.’
_____
_____.

The speaker:

The speaker introduces himself when he says,
At morning in the dark I rise;
And shivering in my nakedness,
By the cold candle, bathe and dress.
We get a sense of who he is and his life because
_____
_____

Structure and imagery:

Stevenson uses structure to build to the final image.
‘And tree and house, and hill and lake,
Are frosted like a wedding-cake.’
The structure is _____
This builds because
_____
The final image emphasis the beauty the speaker sees because _____.
Just as a wedding cake is _____, so too is the setting
_____

Wales: Fern Hill - Dylan Thomas

Task:Read the poem

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
The night above the dingle starry,
Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
Trail with daisies and barley
Down the rivers of the windfall light.

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
In the sun that is young once only,
Time let me play and be
Golden in the mercy of his means,
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
And the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams.

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was
air
And playing, lovely and watery
And fire green as grass.
And nightly under the simple stars
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars
Flying with the ricks, and the horses
Flashing into the dark.

And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
The sky gathered again
And the sun grew round that very day.
So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
Out of the whinnying green stable
On to the fields of praise.

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
In the sun born over and over,
I ran my heedless ways,
My wishes raced through the house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
Before the children green and golden
Follow him out of grace.

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
In the moon that is always rising,
Nor that riding to sleep
I should hear him fly with the high fields
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

Listening

Listen to this reading of the poem by Anthony Hopkins
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YgydnKprrE
Discuss the effect of Hopkins's voice in reading the poem. What does he bring to it? Think about the actor and his voice, his persona and career, and the themes of childhood and the past.

_____

_____

Music - Watch this video on a piece of music inspired by the poem and the line, 'Down the rivers of windfall light'
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pA0w9pyJxl0
What points does the composer make about the poem? What does he say about childhood?

_____

_____

What does he say about his music?

_____

_____

Dylan Thomas, the Poet

Task: Search online for information on the poet, his life and his writings.
Search Criteria:
‘Dylan Thomas, poet’
‘The life of Dylan Thomas’
‘The writing of Dylan Thomas’
Now that you’ve read about his life, add 2Now that you’ve read a little on his life and writing, add 2 search criteria of your own that is specific to Thomas:
1. ..
2. ..

Findings:

Understanding the poem

The poem is about the happy memories of the speaker's childhood. In your own words, summarise these memories, using evidence (quotes) from the poem to help explain.

In the final stanza the speaker now reflects on death. What, in your own words, does he say about death?

Analysing the poem

The Speaker

‘Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs’ - The speaker tells us about his childhood and the picture he creates is on of happiness. This is conveyed with the word choice of

_____
_____

‘And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns’ - The imagery of ‘prince of the apple towns conveys _____

- Just as a prince is _____, so too is the speaker

_____

'I was huntsman and herdsman,’ - When remembering this time in his life, the speaker is nostalgic for the freedom and confidence in his childhood. This is conveyed through the alliteration and word choice of ‘huntsman and herdsman’ which emphasises his feelings of being powerful in these surroundings, and also connotations of

_____

‘I ran my heedless ways,
My wishes raced through the house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows’ - The word choice of ‘heedless ways’ suggests

_____

- His happiness is conveyed through the personification of ‘My wishes raced through the house high hay’ and this suggests

_____

Other quotes that show us the personality fo the speaker as a child are

_____
_____

References to sounds

‘As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,’ The sound reference is _____ and the atmosphere this creates is

_____

‘Out of the whinnying green stable’ This is use of both sound and personification because

_____
_____

Time (the other character)

‘Time let me hail and climb …
Time let me play and be' Time is personified and the poet makes Time itself a character in the poem, who has a purpose and personality and this is

_____

‘In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs’ The character is clearly conveyed and we get a sense of Time being _____
'I should hear him fly with the high fields’ _____

Use of colour

Analyse the word choice used (and the contest of colours if appropriate), commenting on the connotations of the colours, what do we associate these colour with and what is the effect in context of the poem?

‘Golden in the heydays of his eyes,’ _____
‘Trail with daisies and barley’ _____
‘Golden in the mercy of his means,
And green and golden’ _____
‘Before the children green and golden’ _____

Imagery

Analyse the images, using the first example as a template.

’Down the rivers of the windfall light.’ The metaphor creates a sense of a wonderful light filled world. Just as a river flows naturally, so too does the light fall on the natural world like a cascade of water. This has the effect of emphasising the natural beauty and joy of the setting in place and time.
‘And the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams.’

_____

‘On to the fields of praise.’

_____

‘Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days,’ _____
‘Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.’

_____

Symbolism of the Garden of Eden

Task: Look up the meaning of the literary term ‘symbolism’. Symbolism means

_____

Research the story of the garden of Eden. Summaries the story:

_____
_____
_____

Now look at the poem and. Note down any words of phrases that you think might symbolise the Garden of Eden story and explain the connection as you see it:

_____
_____
_____

Ireland: The One - Patrick Kavanagh

Task: Read the article about Kavanagh's work
https://www.irishcatholic.com/shining-a-light-on-ordinary-parish-life/

Task: Read through the poem
Green, blue, yellow and red –
God is down in the swamps and marshes
Sensational as April and almost incred-
ible the flowering of our catharsis.
A humble scene in a backward place
Where no one important ever looked
The raving flowers looked up in the face
Of the One and the Endless, the Mind that has baulked
The profoundest of mortals. A primrose, a violet,
A violent wild iris – but mostly anonymous performers
Yet an important occasion as the Muse at her toilet
Prepared to inform the local farmers
That beautiful, beautiful, beautiful God
Was breathing His love by a cut-away bog.

Patrick Kavanagh, the Poet

Task: Search online for information of the poet, his life and his writings.
Search Criteria:
‘Patrick Kavanagh, poet’
‘The life Patrick Kavanagh’
‘The writing of Patrick Kavanagh’
Now that you’ve read a little on his life and writing, add 2 search criteria of your own that is specific to Kavanagh:
1. ..
2. ..

Findings:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Understanding the poem

What do you think the poem is about? Justify this by referring to the text itself.

What d you think the poem is saying about the natural world? Why do you think this?

Summarise, in your own words, the lines or phrases you see as being positive

Quote and put into your own words, the sections where the poet ponders the ordinary world.

For example, ‘God is down in the swamps and marshes’ - The poet says that the land, ‘swamps and marshes’, is beautiful, because he says God is present there. God (and thus beauty) is all around us.

What do you think the poem is saying about God?

Analysing the poem

Word choice:

Example - The word choice of ‘Green, blue, yellow and red’ creates a colourful atmosphere, and this is is because of the associations we make with these colours placed together. Grouped like this, we think of a vibrant and busy garden full of life.

A humble scene in a backward place’ - The word choice contrasts here. The meaning of the stand out words is _____ and the connotations are of _____.

‘The raving flowers’ _____.

Contrast:

‘God is down in the swamps and marshes’ - The contrast here is between ‘God’ and the ‘swamps and marshes’. In other words he says _____.

Setting:

‘A humble scene in a backward place’ _____

Rhyme:

‘incred- … red.’ - Kavanagh cuts word ‘incredible in half, elongating it, so that it rhymes with ‘red.’ The effect is _____.

‘God … bog.’ - The contrast of this rhyme has the effect of _____.

‘A primrose, a violet,
A violent wild iris’

_____
_____

Repetition:

‘That beautiful, beautiful, beautiful God’ The word ‘beautiful is repeated in order to highlight _____.

Imagery:

‘Sensational as April’ - This simile conveys _____.

‘the flowering of our catharsis. ‘ - _____.

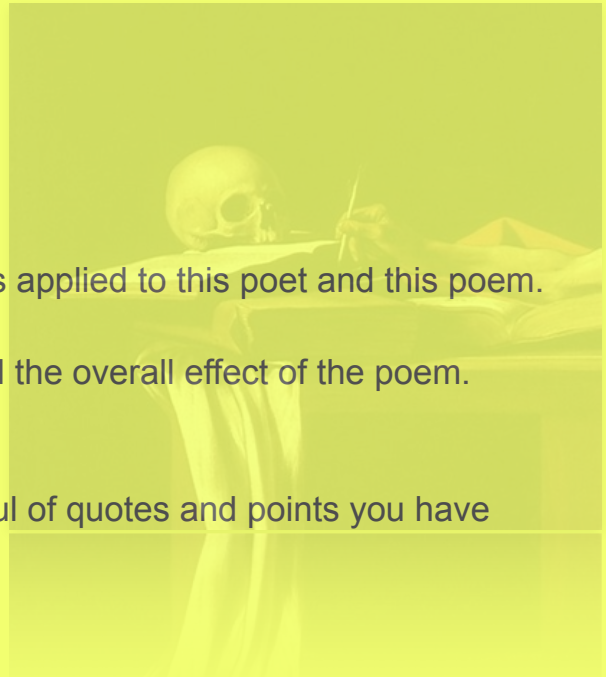
’Was breathing His love by a cut-away bog.’ - The imagery creates a sense of beauty and we see this _____.

Imagery:

That beautiful, beautiful, beautiful God
Was breathing His love by a cut-away bog.

_____
_____

Back to ‘The Death of the author’…



Pick one of the poets you’ve looked at and the poem analysed.
Write a short essay on the application of the theory of the death of the author as applied to this poet and this poem.
Plan

- Introduction: Introduce the poem - the title, the poet, the techniques used, and the overall effect of the poem.
- Summary: Briefly outline what the poem is about.
- Paragraph 1: Outline the poet’s life and work as you have researched it.
- Paragraph 2: First technique - word choice, imagery, setting etc (pick a handful of quotes and points you have made in your notes and thread them together).
- Paragraph 3: Second technique - etc.
- Paragraph 4: Third Technique - etc.
- Paragraph 5: The theory of the death of the author - discuss the theory, the author of the theory, what the theory proposes. Now discuss the theory in context of your chosen poet and poem. Are you convinced by the theory? Why/why not?.
- Conclusion: Sum up the points covered and lastly reflect on your own opinion of the success of the poem.

Follow on work

More poems to explore:
https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/what-is-the-best-poem-about-the-british-countryside-2066110.html