



## Prescribed Poetry 'The Forge' by Seamus Heaney

**Please note:** *The Forge* by Seamus Heaney is a poem included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2025. It may be used to explore poetry at Ordinary Level or Higher Level.



Image courtesy of *The Guardian*

### Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons or as part of a unit of learning
- Students may wish to complete some tasks individually or in pairs/groups
- Tasks might be completed orally and/or in written format
- Students may also wish to engage in a think, pair, share activity for some tasks.

### Making connections with the continuum of learning



Students should be able to:

Develop appropriate stances for reading and/or viewing in all literary genres. This means students should...read poetry conscious of its specific mode of using language as an artistic medium.

Develop an awareness of their own responses, affective, imaginative, and intellectual, to aesthetic texts. Explore these responses relative to the texts read, generate and justify meanings and build coherent interpretations.

(Leaving Certificate Syllabus, p.13)

### Pre-reading discussion:

“In our contemporary world, we can always draw inspiration from the work ethic and expertise of the craftspeople of the past.”



Discuss this statement considering how times, practices and traditions have changed over the years. You may wish to discuss whether these changes are positive or negative, or both.



## 'The Forge' by Seamus Heaney

All I know is a door into the dark.  
Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting;  
Inside, the hammered anvil's short-pitched ring,  
The unpredictable fantail of sparks  
Or hiss when a new shoe toughens in water.  
The anvil must be somewhere in the centre,  
Horned as a unicorn, at one end and square,  
Set there immoveable: an altar  
Where he expends himself in shape and music.  
Sometimes, leather-aproned, hairs in his nose,  
He leans out on the jamb, recalls a clatter  
Of hoofs where traffic is flashing in rows;  
Then grunts and goes in, with a slam and flick  
To beat real iron out, to work the bellows.



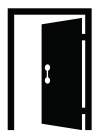
### Key Vocabulary

**Forge** – a blacksmith's workshop

**Anvil** – a heavy iron block used by blacksmiths in shaping iron

**Jamb** – the side post of a doorway

**Bellows** – a device used for blowing air into a fire





## Some aspects of poetry include...

### Content in poetry

The content of a poem is what the poet wants to communicate to the reader and it can be explored and interpreted in various ways. The poem's content can often make it a source of reflection or emotion.



**Narrative:** Narrative poems have characters, a plot, and often a sequence of events, condensed into poetic form.

**Subject Matter:** The specific topic or topics that the poem addresses.

**Themes:** Themes are the central ideas or views that the poem explores.

**Social and Cultural Commentary:** Some poems address social, cultural, or political issues, providing a platform for critique.

**Philosophical Reflections:** Poetry often delves into philosophical questions and musings about the human experience, existence, and the nature of reality.

### Style in poetry

Style refers to the poet's unique way of using language and literary devices to convey their ideas, emotions, and themes. It is the overall arrangement of the poem. Some poets have a formal structured style, while others prefer free verse.



Style might include elements such as:

- Diction (word selection)
- Use of imagery
- Tone
- Rhythm
- Rhyme scheme
- Stanza structure

### Language in poetry

Language is more focused on specific words and expression. It refers to the words and phrases used by the poet to convey their ideas and themes.



Language might includes elements such as:

- Literal language (means exactly what it says)
- Figurative language (uses similes, metaphors, hyperbole, and personification to describe something often through comparison with something different)
- Individual words
- Symbols



## Possible Questions

1. ‘*The Forge* is a celebration of traditional craft.’

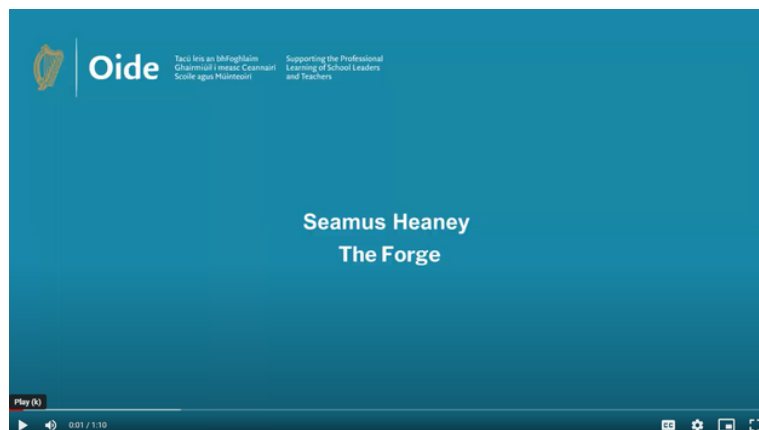
Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Develop your response with reference to both the **subject matter** and **style** of the poem.

2. Seamus Heaney makes effective use of simple language and concrete imagery to explore complex, abstract ideas throughout the above poem.”

Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the above statement. Support your discussion with reference to both the **content** and **language** of the poem.

3. Take a look at the following audio visual presentation of ‘The Forge’. Click on the image below to access the video.



How does the poet employ poetic techniques to create a rich sensory experience for the reader?

You might consider some of the following:

- Imagery
- Onomatopoeia
- Internal rhyme
- Alliteration
- Rhythm
- Other?