

## “Do Now” Work

How does Heaney present his ideas in 'Storm on the Island'?

*Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.*

**Task:** Write these definitions:

- Free verse: has no meter or rhyme scheme
- Blank verse: has a consistent meter (e.g. iambic pentameter) but no rhyme scheme

In Silence Please

 **BOURNVILLE**  
SCHOOL

**How does Heaney present his ideas in 'Storm on the Island'?**

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The poem describes the experience of being in a cliff top cottage on an island off the coast of Ireland during a storm. Heaney describes the ground, the sea and the wind. The people in the cottage are isolated and can do nothing against the powerful and violent weather. The poem describes the violent side of nature; nature is "savage" and hostile, and Heaney uses a series of military metaphors: the wind (like a fighter-bomber) "dives and strafes" while space is a "salvo" and air "bombards" the islanders. The poem explains that the island dwellers build their houses small and "squat" - but when the storm breaks, they can do nothing but "sit tight". The wind is so powerful that the sea spray hits "the very windows" of the houses. Heaney conveys the unpredictability of nature through the simile of a cat - much of the time it is "company" (friendly) and "tame" (safe) but in the storm it turns "savage" and "spits".

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**Key Words**

- squat - short and crouched
- wizened - shrivelled with age
- stacks/stooks - piles, most likely haystacks in this context
- strafes - bombardments (gunfire)
- salvo - rapid gunfire

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**Seamus Heaney 'Storm on the Island'**

blank verse

*community* → We are prepared: we build our houses squat,  
 Sink walls in rock and roof them with good slate. *used to storms* *caesurae*  
 This wizened earth has never troubled us  
 With hay, so, as you see, there are no stacks  
Or stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees, *enjambment*  
 Which might prove company when it blows full  
Blast: you know what I mean - leaves and branches  
 Can raise a tragic chorus in a gale. *metaphor* *violence of storms*  
 So that you listen to the thing you fear  
 Forgetting that it pummels your house too. *distraction*  
 But there are no trees, no natural shelter. *nature isn't protecting them*  
You might think that the sea is company,  
Exploding comfortably down on the cliffs  
 But no: when it begins, the flung spray hits  
 The very windows, spits like a tame cat *enjambment*  
Turned savage. We just sit tight while wind dives  
 And strates invisibly. Space is a salvo, *semantic field*  
 We are bombarded with the empty air. *shift/change*  
 Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.

*isolated*  
*violent verb*  
*oxymoron*  
*simile*  
*wild, as a cat*

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**Politics**

Storm on the Island contains an extended metaphor for the political storm that raged across Northern Ireland in the second half of the twentieth century. The storm pummeling the island in the poem is a metaphor for the violence in Northern Ireland.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/troubles>



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What is the poem's context?

Power

The poem describes a cottage on the edge of a cliff in Ireland in a storm.

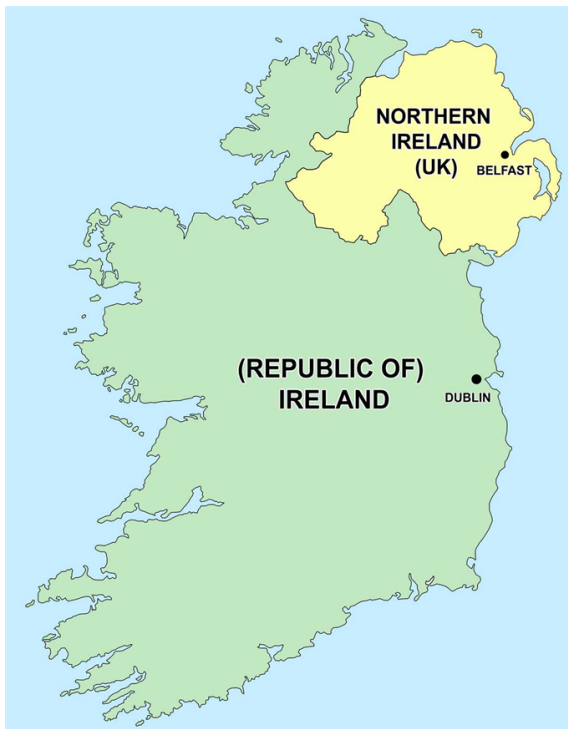
Conflict

**Storm on the island** - Stormont Estate in Northern Ireland (Parliament buildings). Extended metaphor for The Troubles in Northern Ireland.

Heaney said: "The secret of being a poet lies in the summoning and meshing of the subconscious and semantic energies of the world."

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1922 - Ireland became a country in its own right, but Northern Ireland stayed part of the UK. 1939 - Heaney born (Catholic)

Northern Ireland:

- Protestant - British
- Catholic - Leave the UK and have a united Ireland.

1960s - Civil rights movement for Irish Catholics. The IRA were set up to protect Catholics and to drive the British out of Ireland through a bombing and terror campaign. The Good Friday agreement in 1998 was supposed to end The Troubles.

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**Seamus Heaney 'Storm on the Island'**

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Sink walls in rock and roof them with good slate.  
This wizened earth has never troubled us  
With hay, so, as you see, there are no stacks  
Or stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees  
Which might prove company when it blows full  
Blast: you know what I mean - leaves and branches  
Can raise a tragic chorus in a gale  
So that you listen to the thing you fear  
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But there are no trees, no natural shelter.  
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The very windows, spits like a tame cat  
Turned savage. We just sit tight while wind dives  
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We are bombarded with the empty air.  
Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.

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- salvo - simultaneous artillery shells
- strafes - attack repeatedly with bombs or machine-gun fire

Metaphor for the trouble and violence in Northern Ireland.

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Compare the ways poets present the power of nature in 'Storm on the island' and in one other poem from 'Power and Conflict'.

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In 'Storm on the island', Seamus Heaney presents the sense of community that arises from a troubling situation: "We are prepared". This is a bold opening line and conveys that although nature is powerful, it cannot defeat a well armed community. He starts the poem in the middle of the action, just like the community face the storm head on. The pronoun "we" is inclusive and could signify that it is not referring to one storm, and it involves the reader into the action to convey that everyone should be made aware of the storm. This is repeated with saying they "built their houses squat". The adjective "squat" implies that they are sturdy, well build structures that could foreshadow the force of nature and the storm. This is similar to 'Exposure' as Wilfred Owen says "Our brains ache". This also shows that his experiences are inclusive to many other people. However, it is dissimilar as the verb "ache" conveys the physical pain that humans feel from the power of nature. Alternatively, this could connote the idea of the mental struggle that soldiers went through during World War I. Wilfred Owen was a war poet and wrote this poem to not only convey the horrible conditions they faced due to the weather but the agony of boredom.

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However, this idea is subverted again as both of the poems portray the inclusiveness of community, but they are isolated from the outside world. In 'Storm on the island', the wind is described as raising a "tragic chorus". A "chorus" is a device used in Greek mythology to narrate parts of a story that could not be acted. In 'Storm on the island', this demonstrates that they are alone in their suffering and have to tell the story themselves. This could be a comment on the conflict in Ireland at the time. Heaney was an Irish poet, and it could be inferred that this poem uses a storm as a metaphor for the corruption that was caused by the IRA. This is parallel in 'Exposure' as the soldiers are left to "turn back to our dying". Owen wrote this to convey that nature ultimately leads to their misery and isolation. All "the doors are shut" on the soldiers and they cannot recover from the "merciless iced east winds".

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What is a PET sentence?

Heaney uses a semantic field of a battle in his poem: 'exploding', 'strafes', 'salvo' and 'bombarded'. While on the surface, this could be describing the violent storm, it could also suggest...

Heaney's poem is an extended metaphor for the Troubles in Northern Ireland: 'Storm on the island'. The poem's title could refer to...

(Stormont, island/Ireland, 'storm')

## 'Storm on the Island' Heaney

### Context:

Heaney's poetry is often about the countryside, recalling his childhood in Northern Ireland. This poem describes the experience of being in a cliff top cottage off the coast of Ireland during a storm. However, on another level it could be an extended metaphor for the **troubles in Northern Ireland**. The poem's title spells **Stormont** – the name of the Government buildings of Northern Ireland. The word **island** is a homophone as it sounds like **Ireland**.

### Themes:

Power of nature  
Effects of conflict

**S** Tone changes from positive: 'We are prepared' to fearful: 'huge nothing that we fear'. There is a contrast between the solidity of the 'rock' and 'slate' at the start and the invisible force at the end.

**P** There is a semantic field of emptiness: 'empty', 'nothing', 'space', 'invisibly' which emphasises the humans' powerlessness against the storm. The fear seems to come from empty space; the wind is powerful.

**L** 'exploding comfortably' - oxymoron showing the power of nature.

'pummels your house' - violent verb choice and second person to involve the reader.

**I** There is a semantic field of battle: 'strafes', 'salvo', 'bombarded', 'exploding' and 'blast' which emphasises the violence of the storm. Alternatively, these words could be a metaphor for the violence in 'The Troubles'.

**T** 'Like a tame cat / Turned savage' - simile representing the structure of the poem - starts safe and becomes frightening and violent. The enjambment represents the sudden change in the sea, reflecting nature's power.

