

### *Digging Down into the Bog of Metaphor and Symbolism with Seamus Heaney*

Now it is time for you all to get a little dirty. On our field trip today to the Natural History Museum, I hope you will be able to experience this extensive collection of archeological finds with the same awe you might have had as a child. Of course, we can never return to our eight-year-old minds and bodies, but we can recapture some of that youthful imagination and creativity by looking at the world through poetry.

Now don't misunderstand me. I do not mean that we should turn weepy and sentimental and nostalgic. That's just gross. I do mean, however, that children tend not to censor their imaginations, that is not until untutored and boorish adults get hold of them; so I would like you all to see the items on display with that same freedom of the mind at play. Essentially I want you to be poets for the day.

Take a walk around the museum, check out all the floors with dinosaur and mammal bones—a giant mesosaur swims right above your heads in the atrium—an exotic if not macabre collection of stuffed birds, and snakes, live snakes that will leave you "Zero at the bone"! Oh, yes, and you can stand a foot away from General Custer's horse left standing when Custer himself lay littered with feathered arrows.

1. Find an object you like and write the name of the display:  
*Longfish - Pennsylvanian Sea Fossils in Eastern Kansas*
2. Describe the object in detail, noting its overall composition (how the curators have chosen to display it) as well as its smaller or less conspicuous parts.  
*green & brown feathers to white at base, (brownish base)  
eye staring at you, the predator, facing well, as if in movement.*
3. What attracts you to it? What is fascinating or curious or provocative?  
*shape, flow of body, warm brown color, eye, neck, rigidity, ~~whole~~  
whole thing in room full of bones*
4. Use a simile to describe the object:  
*Hardly through the water like a torpedo*
5. Use a metaphor to describe the object:  
*seemed ~~to~~ a wary child.*
6. List four or five images (or more for the truly ambitious) drawn from this display that you think would work well in a poem. Remember imagery evokes all the senses so don't limit yourself to the visual.  
*life-like model access from fossil/skeleton of large predator mostly smell in basement, like dirt  
echoing steps like  
bit of coffee lightly  
closing  
everything almost the same  
brown color, narrows some  
end/fate*

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### Little Lost Lungfish

As you swam in the shallows  
And the bright sea, I wonder  
If you could have imagined  
How much the world has changed.

Did you then appreciate  
The purity and freedom  
That all life experienced,  
However perilous and fleeting?

Oh how the bones of the past  
Serve as the foundation on which  
Life continuously renews, rebuilds  
Only to fall at the barest instant!

Did you exult in your sleek body,  
Almost a missile, or did the lungs  
Gifted to you give pleasure  
When they filled with crisp air?

Oh how fresh everything must've been  
And going where you please  
As long as there weren't jaws  
To snuff out life to prolong its own!

Did you swim among the pillars  
Crafted by microbes, things  
That even now are understood  
Incompletely; secrets hidden?

Oh how the tiny things, unknown  
To you, have built structures that  
Proportionally to our creations  
Tower in grandeur, yet simplicity!

Did you realize the significance  
Of your first journey to land?  
Near where you took your first steps  
I took mine, both uncertain and excited.

Oh how you might not have taken those  
First steps, had you known that the world  
Would spawn vessels of destruction  
Shaped much like you!

Did your screaming eye, beady and wary,  
Swivel to the pillars that sheltered  
Both you and your prey and seek  
There a means of escape?

Oh how even in death you would serve  
To prolong life, to provide the sustenance  
And substance on which small creatures  
Might seek to build a living!

Did you struggle in the end  
As teeth gnashed, to cling to life  
Or as time ravaged as it does  
And left you flaking in the bottoms?

Oh how the ages pass, bringing change;  
Where once you were free and vital  
Now only exists a glass prison and  
The bones of the forgotten, newly found!

Did all this happen, that I might be free  
From both death and shackles  
Only to fall as chaff in a field of billowing  
Mushrooms, reminiscent of stromatolites?

Oh how I wish I could freely imbibe the sun  
And drink up the starlight, as you once did!  
But I wish, I think, I love, I hope, I know  
That my – our – fate will never be yours.