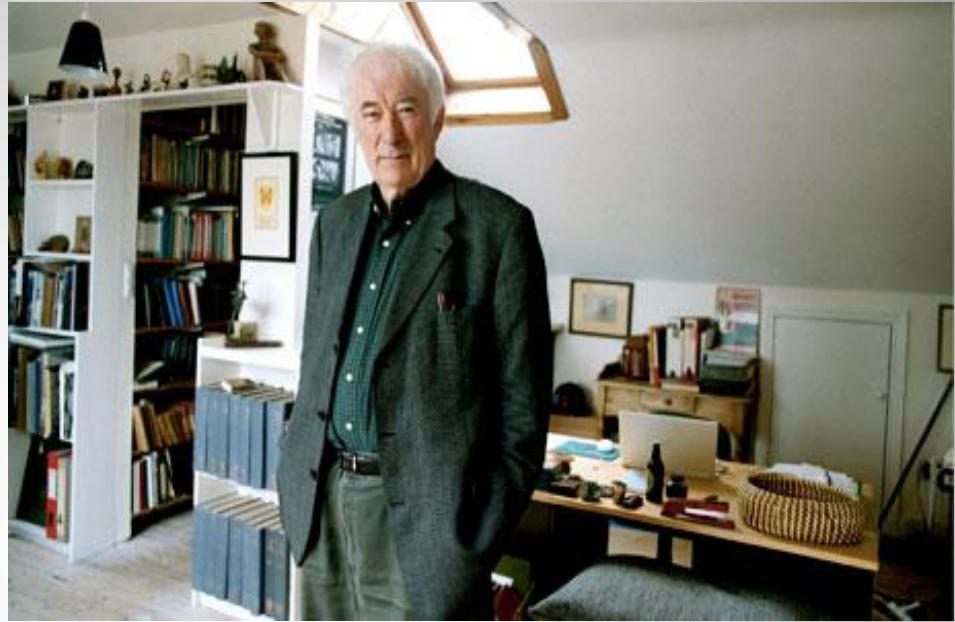


Irish Writers



Ann Marie O'Brien
English Matters, Dublin

Aims of Workshop

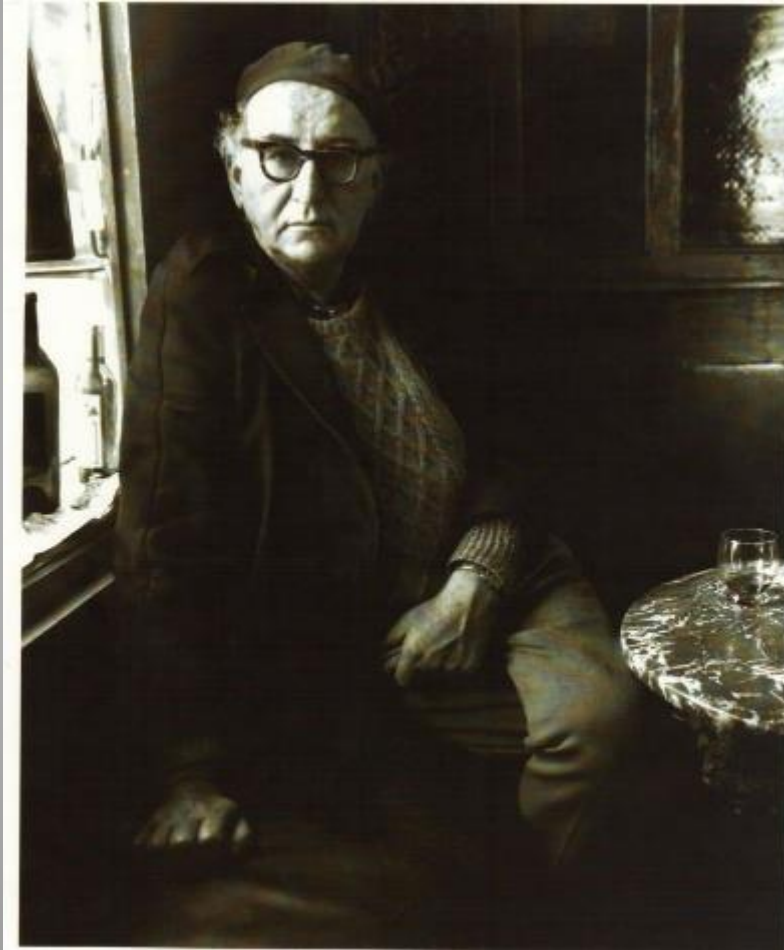
- To present the work and subject matter of a selection of Irish writers
- To show how a selection of Irish texts can be used to develop students' literacy skills and critical thinking skills

Objectives

- To know some facts about the subject matter of a selection of Irish writers
- To participate in oral and written exercises inspired by a selection of Irish texts

Patrick Kavanagh

1904 - 1967



**Kavanagh's birthplace in
Monaghan**

Kavanagh's Poetry

A poet of place

Life in rural Ireland

Great beauty and deep truths can be found in 'the ordinary, the banal'.

Seeing 'the newness that was in every stale thing'

Personal experience – his responses and reflections

Canal Bank Walk



Kavanagh had just come out of hospital and on the banks of the Grand Canal he said, ‘again I saw the beauty of water and green grass and the magic of light...as a poet, I was born in or about 1955, the place of my birth being the banks of the Grand Canal.

Canal Bank Walk

Leafy-with-love banks and the green waters of the canal
Pouring redemption for me, that I do
The will of God, wallow in the habitual, the banal,
Grow with nature again as before I grew.
The bright stick trapped, the breeze adding a third
Party to the couple kissing on an old seat,
And a bird gathering materials for the nest for the Word,
Eloquently new and abandoned to its delirious beat.
O unworn world enrapture me, encapture me in a web
Of fabulous grass and eternal voices by a beech,
Feed the gaping need of my senses, give me ad lib
To pray unselfconsciously with overflowing speech,
For this soul needs to be honoured with a new dress woven
From green and blue things and arguments that cannot be proven.

Patrick Kavanagh



Canal Bank Walk

Ideas for the classroom

- Get students to write about their favourite place.
- Get students to create collages as visual representations of the poem using cut out pictures of things described in the poem e.g. water, sky, grass, birds, nests, trees, couples etc.

On Raglan Road



On Raglan Road

1

On Raglan Road on an autumn day I met her first and knew
That her dark hair would weave a snare that I might one day rue;
I saw the danger, yet I walked along the enchanted way,
And I said, let grief be a fallen leaf at the dawning of the day.

2

On Grafton Street in November we tripped lightly along the ledge
Of the deep ravine where can be seen the worth of passion's pledge,
The Queen of Hearts still making tarts and I not making hay –
O I loved too much and by such, by such, is happiness thrown away.

3

I gave her gifts of the mind, I gave her the secret sign that's known
To the artists who have known the true gods of sound and stone
And word and tint. I did not stint for I gave her poems to say
With her own name there and her own dark hair like clouds over fields of
May.

4

On a quiet street where old ghosts meet I see her walking now
Away from me so hurriedly my reason must allow
That I had wooed not as I should a creature made of clay –
When the angel woos the clay he'd lose his wings at the dawn of day.





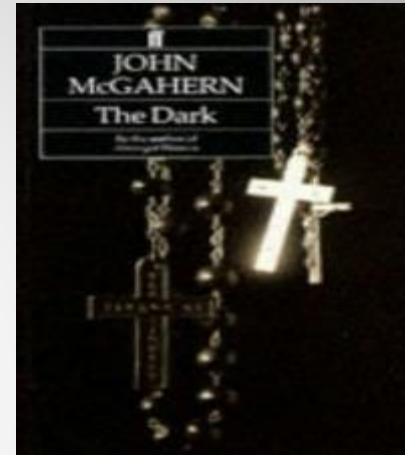
On Raglan Road

Ideas for the classroom

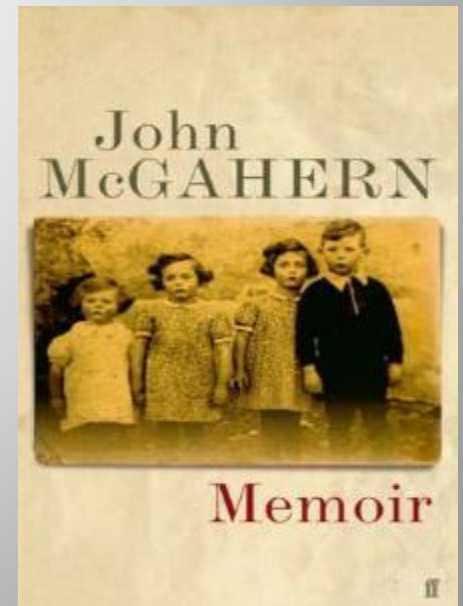
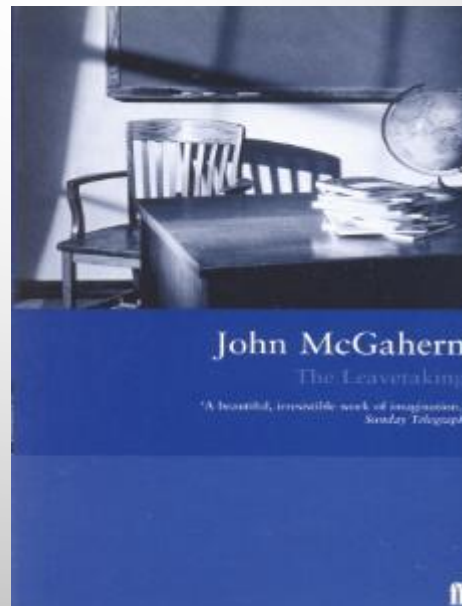
- Teach a class the song (Listen to Luke Kelly singing the song on YouTube)
- Cut up the words from the poem and give them out in envelopes to students. Ask pairs or groups to create their own poem by selecting from and arranging the words in any way they like. They may also add their own words. Have readings of group poems with class discussion about lines that interest them.

John McGahern

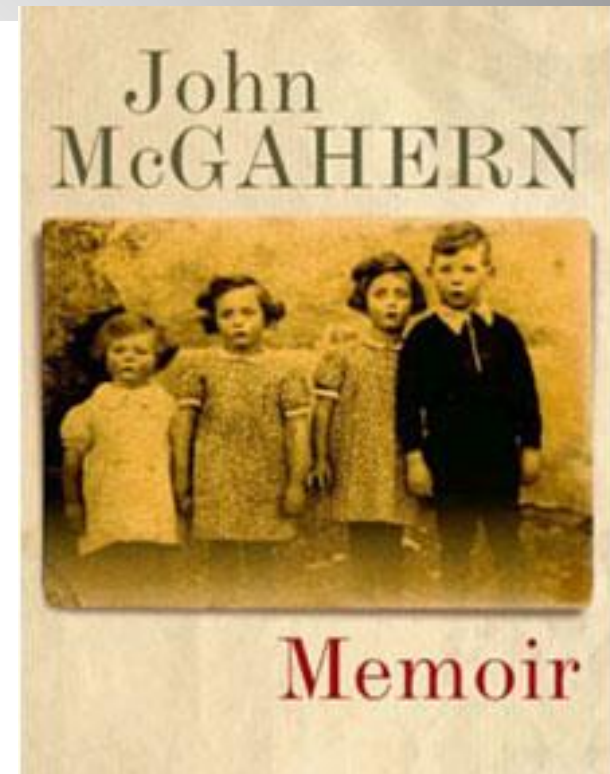
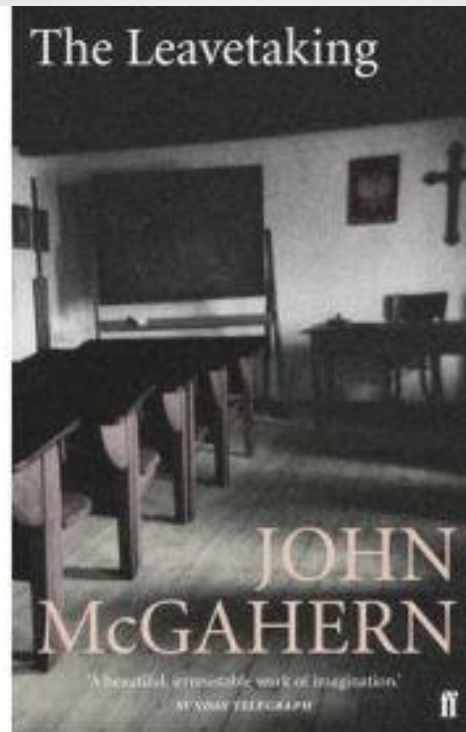
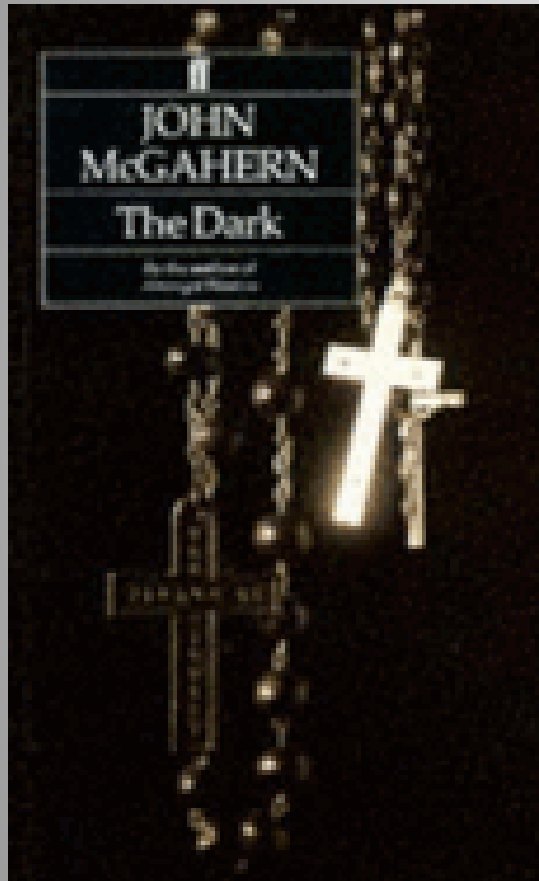
1934 - 2006



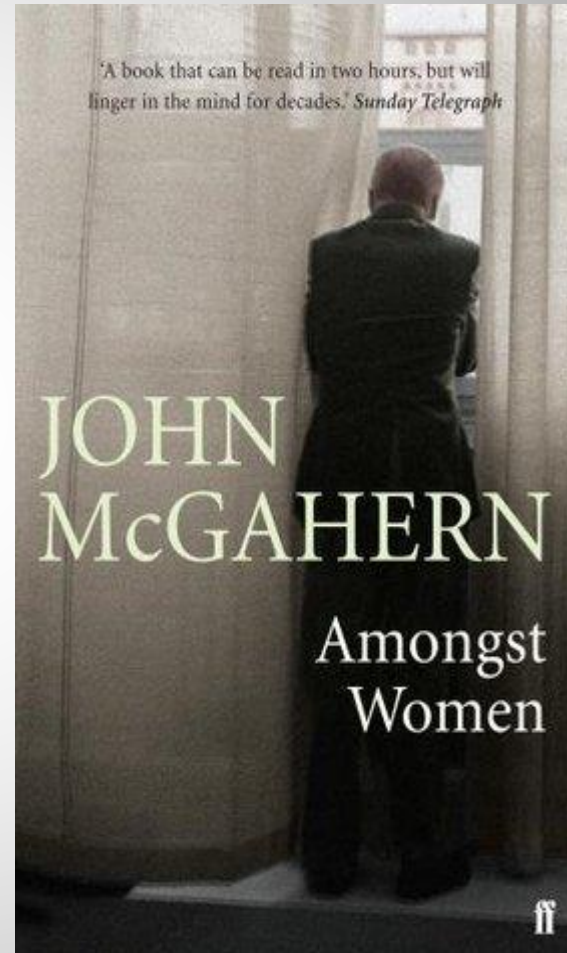
'The best of life is life lived quietly, where nothing happens but our calm journey through the day, where change is imperceptible and the precious life is everything.'



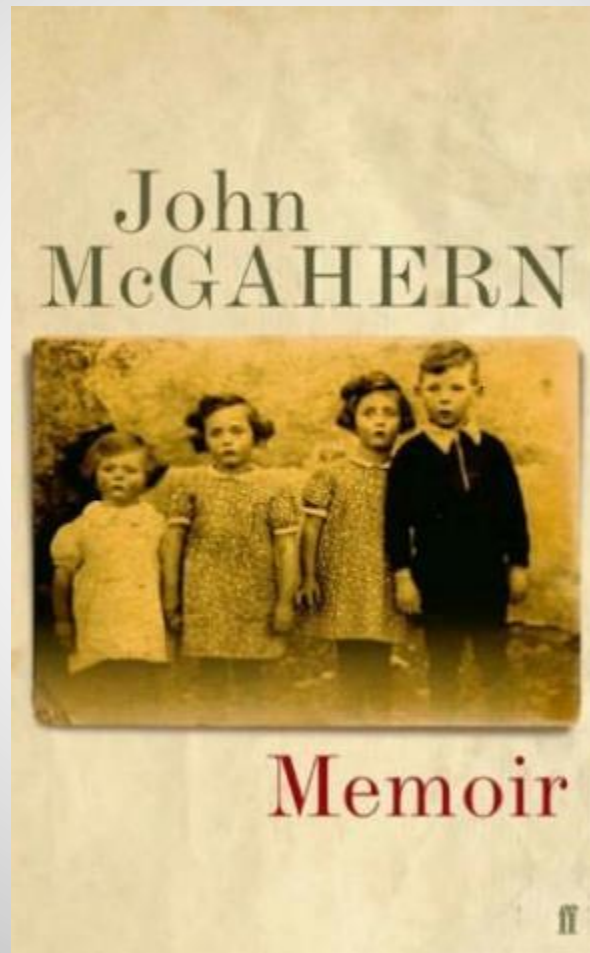
Book covers



Amongst Women



Memoir



Memoir/1

All morning I watched the clock, seeing the minutes that were left beat away. Close to eleven I was frantic. I made sure no one was watching, and took the blue clock from the sideboard and stole out with it to the avenue by the elder tree along the footpath to the arch. She'd never see again the flat fragrant blossom turn into clusters of tiny black grapes. Under the evergreens it was dark on the avenue. There was no one in sight, but I hurried until I reached the great oak halfway up the hill to the Bawn, and entered the deep thick laurels. I held the cold glass of the clock to my face as the minutes beat away. The church was now full. The altar boys in black and white were coming out on the altar ahead of the priests. I had only a wren for company, flitting from branch to bare branch under the thick covering of leaves. The four candles were lit around the coffin under the sanctuary lamp. *Introibo ad altere dei. Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam.* I could stop nothing now. I followed the Mass from movement to movement, holding the clock in my hands, weeping.

Memoir/2

At the end of the Mass the priests go to chairs at the side of the altar. The altar boys sit on the altar steps. My father and Uncle Jimmy stand at a small table outside the rail. Silently the mourners come to place offerings of money on the table in front of my father and uncle. As soon as the line ends, the two men count the money into small blue bags and write the sum that has been gathered on a slip of paper. They bring the slip of paper and the blue bags to the priest. The sum that is read out is unusually large. My mother was a teacher and she was young. Father McGrail faces the people and talks of the life she lived in the world, her devotion, her modesty, her gentleness, her care for everything placed in her trust. I cried out as I listened and thought the hands of the clock were about to stop (pp. 132-133).

Ideas for the classroom

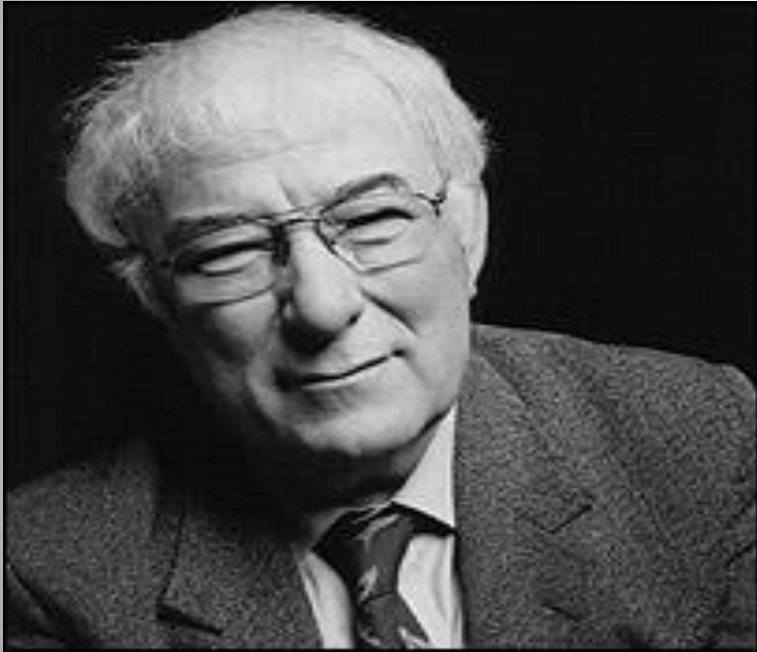
- Visuals – ask students what they think they might know about John McGahern based on the photo, quote & book covers
- Memoir extract – Ask students what they have learned about the world of the child John McGahern from the extract (rural, strong & kind community, importance of ritual/Catholic Church, respect for the teacher)

Themes in McGahern's Works

- Portraits of Ireland – A sociology of 20th century Ireland
- Memory
- Relationships of men to women and of parents to children
- Domestic interiors

Seamus Heaney

1939 - 2013



**Winner of the Nobel Prize for
Literature in 1995**

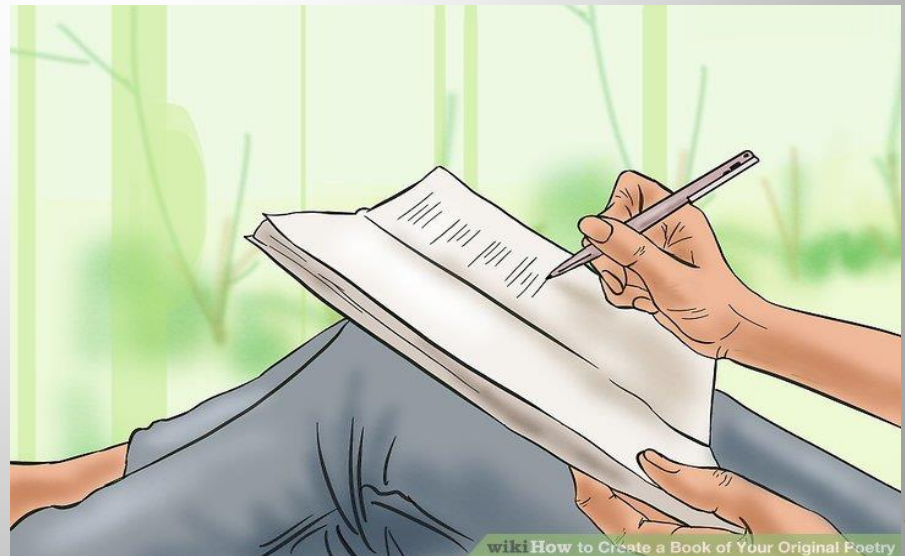


Heaney's Derry

Poetry

‘Poetry is a superb and powerful and effective way to experience an experience. I know of nothing to rival it.’

Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons*



Blackberry Picking

Late August, given heavy rain and sun
for a full week, the blackberries would ripen.
At first, just one, a glossy purple clot
among others, red, green, hard as a knot.
You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet
like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it
leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for
picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger
sent us out with milk-cans, pea-tins, jam-pots
where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots.
Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills
we trekked and picked until the cans were full,
until the tinkling bottom had been covered
with green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned
like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered
with thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's.



We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre.
But when the bath was filled we found a fur,
A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache.
The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush
the fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.
I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair
that all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.
Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not.
Seamus Heaney

Activity: Focus on vocabulary

- Record interesting vocabulary in *Blackberry Picking* using the following headings:
 - i) Vibrant verbs
 - ii) Astonishing adjectives
 - iii) Startling similes
 - iv) Amazing metaphors

Poetry

‘Words have a life of their own, an inner sparkle, a profound vitality...Poetry is an attempt to cut through the effects of deadening familiarity and repeated, mechanical usage in order to unleash that profound vitality, to reveal that inner sparkle.’

Brendan Kennelly



Activity: Focus on vocabulary

Choose alternative words that you think will bring the writing alive in *Blackberry Picking* using the following headings:

- i) Vibrant verbs
- ii) Astonishing adjectives
- iii) Startling similes
- iv) Amazing metaphors

Blackberry Picking

Other ideas for the classroom

- Examples of Heaney appealing to the five senses in the poem – Sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing
- Identifying the boy's positive and negative feelings in the poem
- Identifying what ideas about childhood and nature are presented in the poem

Recommended Contemporary Irish Writers

- John Connolly – crime fiction
- Roddy Doyle - fiction
- Claire Keegan – short stories
- Marian Keyes – fiction & non-fiction
- Belinda McKeon - fiction
- Colm Tóibín – fiction & non-fiction
- William Trevor – fiction & short stories