

The Early Purges

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Title

- ▶ What possible meanings might there be in the word 'early'? For whom is this particular purge 'early'? The kittens? The boy? Both?
- ▶ What is the poet purged of in this poem?



Opening Line

- ▶ Why do you think we are told what age the poet was when he first saw kittens drowned?
- ▶ Why does he tell us that this was the *first* time?



First Stanza

- ▶ Why do you think that the farmhand is named?
- ▶ What do you think of Dan Taggart's language?
- ▶ Do you think Heaney agrees with him? Do you think it is significant that Heaney separates Dan Taggart's words from the rest of the poem by placing them in inverted commas?
- ▶ What word suggests that the kittens are small and weak? What does Heaney's choice of words to describe the kittens tell us about his attitude to the drowning?

Second Stanza

- ▶ What words evoke our sympathy for the kittens?
- ▶ Can you find an example of alliteration in this stanza? What is the effect of this?



Third Stanza

- ▶ What do you think of Dan Taggart's claim? Why does he feel this way?
- ▶ Does this give you the impression that life on the farm is harsh?
- ▶ Can you find a simile in this stanza? What does it bring to mind?



Fourth Stanza

- ▶ Do you think it is significant that the dead kittens were thrown on the dunghill? What does it say about the attitude towards animals?
- ▶ Why was the young boy frightened by the death of the kittens? Do you think it made him realise anything about life?



Fifth Stanza

- ▶ Why does the boy's 'fear come back' when rats, rabbits and old hens are killed?
- ▶ Look at the verbs used to describe Dan's actions. Does he seem decisive? Cruel? Matter-of-fact?
- ▶ Is there any word in this stanza, apart from 'fear', that shows how upsetting and distasteful the young boy found these killings?



Sixth Stanza

- ▶ In what way does the poet's language now echo Dan Taggart's in the first stanza?
- ▶ How has growing up on a farm affected the poet?
- ▶ Do you think that the poet really believes his sentiments, or feelings, were 'false'? Why/Why not?



Final Stanza

- ▶ Why do you think the poet has put the words ‘Prevention of cruelty’ in inverted commas?
- ▶ Are the deaths that take place on the farms natural?
- ▶ Do you believe Heaney agrees with the argument that ‘on well-run farms pests have to be kept down’?



Final Thought...

- ▶ If you were going to write a poem arguing in favour of the need to control animal populations on farms, which stanzas would you have changed and why?

