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Teaching the Northern Ireland Troubles through History and Literature

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TEACHING THE NORTHERN IRELAND TROUBLES THROUGH HISTORY AND
LITERATURE

By

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To the victims of conflict

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Review of Literature.....	3
Museum Exhibits and Library Displays.....	3
The Troubles of Northern Ireland: Origins of the Conflict.....	5
The Troubles of Northern Ireland: A Timeline of Events.....	7
The Troubles of Northern Ireland: Working Toward Resolution.....	10
Seamus Heaney: A Brief Biography.....	14
Seamus Heaney: The Troubles and Poetry.....	17
Seamus Heaney's Poetry.....	19
"Requiem for the Croppies".....	20
"Punishment".....	22
"Casualty".....	24
Explanation of Display Design.....	26
Conclusion.....	36
Works Cited.....	38

ABSTRACT

History and literature complement each other. The study of history can be beneficial to understanding literature, as literature can be beneficial to understanding history. Seamus Heaney's poetry concerning the Troubles can be better understood with a background in the history of the conflict as well as some knowledge about Heaney's own views. Through examining Heaney's poetry with history and biography in mind, a greater understanding of the poetry can be achieved. Through the reading of Heaney's poetry, a better insight into the personal side of the conflict can help the reader understand the conflict as well. The same applies to other literature; in using literature to remember the past, perhaps future conflict can be prevented. In order to influence others to read more about the Troubles and other conflicts, libraries can create book displays about them to generate awareness and create discussion that could be helpful in working toward peace.

Key Words: Seamus Heaney, Northern Ireland, The Troubles, Library Displays

INTRODUCTION

Writers are, at least to some extent, influenced by their time period, setting, and the corresponding major events, and this influence is often apparent within their works. One method of literary analysis involves looking at the biographical background of the author and the historical context of the work. The historical context of the Troubles, the Northern Ireland conflict, can be used as a lens for interpreting the poetry of Seamus Heaney, a Northern Irish Catholic writer during that period.

The Troubles, a period of conflict in Northern Ireland from the 1960s to 1998, resulted from tensions between the English and Irish throughout history. There was considerable violence, resulting in the loss of over 3,600 lives (Sloan 50). The general political and social climate had been divisive for a considerable time, with the Protestants of English heritage on one side and the Catholics of Irish heritage on the other. However, the Troubles was not the first outbreak of violence between the two opposing groups.

Reading fiction and poetry by people who have been personally involved can be beneficial in achieving a greater understanding of the conflict. One poet who experienced the effects of the Troubles and wrote about it was Seamus Heaney, 1995 Nobel Literature Prize winner. He grew up on a farm in Northern Ireland and left Northern Ireland in 1972 (Grimes). In many ways the Troubles and related tensions profoundly affected his life; the conflict also affected his poetry. Therefore, knowledge of the historical conflict provides a context for interpretation of Heaney's work. His own views about the Troubles and the responsibility of poets in writing about political conflict

influence how he writes. His perspective on the Troubles is particularly evident in “Requiem for the Croppies,” “Punishment,” and “Casualty.”

Literature can be used to provide a context for learning about history. Both non-fiction and fiction can contribute to a greater understanding, particularly in developing a compassionate understanding of a conflict. It is also important to discuss literature and history to gain insight from other interpretations and perspectives. In order to help educate others about the Troubles in Northern Ireland, reviews and literature guides for four books will be included in this paper. One element of this project involves creating a miniature library display with a book display and literature guides in the hopes that libraries could set up such a display and encourage their patrons to learn about the conflict through reading about it. Additionally, the display will include several different reading levels of books with literature guides so that families can learn about it together and discuss it and so that parents can reinforce the importance of peace and talk about the Troubles with their children.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Museum Exhibits and Library Displays

History has been said to repeat itself. The application of this concept is that people should learn history that they may learn from it. Memorial museums, such as the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, the Robben Island Museum, and the District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa (Crooke 136), Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, United States (133), and the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., exist to teach people about terrible human abuses so as to prevent similar tragedies from occurring. Teaching the next generations about conflicts can help them understand the past and how to deal with former injustices so that they may help heal the wound rather than continue the problems. Ireland has recently been working to create heritage museums to deal with the Troubles so that the tensions between the two factions may eventually cease. As of 2005, there were several museums in Northern Ireland working towards this goal (134). One, the Museum of Free Derry, takes the experiences of local people and forms “a microcosm history of the entire troubles and the background to the troubles and the cause of the troubles,” and through the creation of the museum as a community project, provides what could be “the first step towards getting [each side] to understand each other,” according to the project coordinator, Adrian Kerr (134). It is the hope that such museums can help bring about peace.

Library displays can serve as small-scale museum exhibits, providing information about a conflict and more sources for further learning and reflection. Library displays are considered an effective method of promoting specific library materials to increase their rates of circulation. This effectiveness appears to be more assumed rather than

quantitatively researched, though there has been at least one study on the subject. According to the research of Michele Seipp, Sandra Lindberg, and Keith Curry Lance, book displays, an idea seemingly borrowed from bookstores, do increase circulation. Seipp, Lindberg, and Lance researched the effectiveness through a study at their own library, Lafayette Public Library in Colorado. They created a control/variable study by using two of the same books with one copy on display and one copy on the shelves. Their results were as follows: "Of the 182 fiction titles, display copies were checked out 348 times, compared to 180 times for shelf copies," which would be a 93% increase (Seipp, Lindberg, and Lance). Additionally, "[o]f the 398 non-fiction titles, 382 display copies were checked out, compared to 306 shelf copies," which is a 25% increase" (Seipp, Lindberg, and Lance). There are, however, some confounding variables, such as the general interest in the books themselves, and further research needs to be done in this area. Still, this study suggests that book displays are effective.

In his book *Library Displays Handbook*, Mark Schaeffer explains the elements of design in the context of library displays and the process for making library displays. Though the book was published in 1991, the principles of design and the concepts relating to displays have not changed very much, though the process has become easier through the increase in personal computer technology. Schaeffer's steps for creating a display are as follows: "Identify a Need," "Pick a Theme or a Specific Subject," "Find an Appropriate Space," "Write the Text of a Display," and "Design and Produce the Display" (156-59). These steps and the accompanying explanations detail how to go about designing a library display, though Schaeffer acknowledges that deviation from the linear order of this process is necessary at times, as the creative

process is not linear (156). As most of the information in this book is somewhat outdated because personal computers were not as common in 1991, the process for creating the components of the overall design will differ somewhat from those in Schaeffer's book.

A more recent book, *Great Displays for Your Library Step by Step* by Susan P. Phillips, recommends Schaeffer's book as a starting point for library display design. However, as it was published in 2008, Phillips makes great use of computer access in her designs. Phillips explains how she made over forty different displays; she includes a section with background information on the subject, a section in which she credits the sources of her ideas for the display, a section wherein she describes her process with specific details on materials, and a short section with ideas for making an expanded display. The format for the chapters emphasizes the importance of having background information about the topic, as well as providing background information for viewers of the display because the purpose of library displays is to foster interest in a subject and provide a means for learning more about that subject.

The Troubles of Northern Ireland: Origins of the Conflict

The Troubles refers to the conflict from the 1960s to 1998, which ostensibly ended with the Good Friday Agreement. However, this conflict is rooted in tensions originating from English involvement in Gaelic Ireland. It is important to note, as Mark Doyle does in his *Fighting Like the Devil for the Sake of God: Protestants, Catholics and the Origins of Violence in Victorian Belfast*, that the Troubles is a separate conflict from earlier conflicts. Specifically referring to his own studies of the Victorian conflict in Belfast, he says, "To explain the Troubles in terms of this single city's nineteenth-

century traditions of violence is to commit an error of geography as well as chronology” (251). In essence, the understanding of a political conflict should not be simplified to the extent that it is portrayed as the natural outcome of historical events. Still, political conflicts are not entirely isolated events either, and preceding historical tensions can accurately be understood as contributing factors. David McKittrick and David McVea view the Troubles as “a more violent expression of existing animosities and unresolved issues of nationality, religion, power and territorial rivalry” (1). From this point of view, the historical background of the earlier conflicts and tensions is an essential part of achieving an accurate understanding of the Troubles.

Since the fifth century CE, Ireland had been influenced by Catholic Christianity, which had been to some extent combined with the earlier traditions of the original inhabitants (Elliot). Then, in 1171, with the permission of the Pope, Henry II started a colony in Ireland (25). English control eventually increased and, after the Reformation, the Protestantism of the English and the Catholicism of the Irish became part of the division. There were several periods of conflict, such as the Nine Years War (1593-1603), which was a war between some of the political leaders of the original inhabitants and the English (33-53). However, it was the Ulster plantation system of the seventeenth century that led to a riot in 1641 which, according to Marianne Elliott in her book *The Catholics of Ulster*, “made religion for the first time the main justification for dispossession” (102). It was from this time on that Irish Catholic and English Protestant became clear divisions, which led to later conflicts as these divisions were often used as the basis for inequity and violence. From the poverty resulting from the Great Famine of 1845-1849, (305-13) the Victorian violence in Belfast, and other historical events, the

tensions and related conflicts resulted in the creation of Northern Ireland in 1921 (373). Anglo-Irish tensions were temporarily resolved on December 23, 1920 with the Government of Ireland Act, which separated Northern and Southern Ireland (United Kingdom 101-07). Concerning this division, the act reads, "Northern Ireland shall consist of the parliamentary counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone, and the parliamentary boroughs of Belfast and Londonderry, and Southern Ireland shall consist of so much Ireland as is not comprised within the said parliamentary counties and boroughs" (102). These six counties are separated because of their comparatively high Protestant population. As a result, Northern Ireland had, and continues to have, clear divisions between Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Loyalist, those that consider themselves Irish and those that consider themselves English. With clear divisions contributing to tension, the conflict would become the long and violent period known as the Troubles.

The Troubles of Northern Ireland: A Timeline of Events

Due to the complex nature of political cause and effect, the official beginning of the Troubles is unclear. Between 1921 and the 1960s, there was a period of relative peace, though the tensions did not disappear. With Prime Minister Terence O'Neill showing interest in moving Northern Ireland toward reconciliation, despite his Unionist affiliation, there was increased concern among more extreme loyalists (McKittrick and McVea 27). As a result, some loyalists were stirred up by Reverend Ian Paisley, and the Ulster Protestant Volunteers were formed in 1966 after some notable protests organized by Paisley (244). There had been loyalist violence against Catholics perpetrated by the Ulster Volunteer Force which resulted in three deaths, including that of a Protestant

widow; consequently, the UVF was made illegal (35). While the nationalists retaliated, the IRA, or Irish Republican Army, was not a large part of it.

During this time, the Catholic mobilization toward civil rights began. There was obvious inequity both economically and politically, with the Catholics feeling disenfranchised and unrepresented in government (38). As a result, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, a loose association without specific party alignment, was formed in 1967 and served to inspire Catholics who were not politically involved to work toward civil rights through peaceful demonstrations (38). The BBC *documentary An Essential History of the Troubles*, which explores the conflict through primary accounts from both sides, begins its explanation with a 1968 peaceful demonstration in Dungannon that was organized by the Catholics to protest the disparity they felt. The civil rights movement's actions were met with antagonism from the loyalists, and it was apparent that the Royal Ulster Constabulary forces would often side with the loyalists. Over time, frustrations with the lack of results led to more violent retaliation by the nationalists, which led to more violence from the loyalist side, creating a vicious cycle.

One such violent incident in 1969 was the Battle of the Bogside, in which nationalists and the RUC fought with bricks, stones, petrol bombs, and tear gas; non-RUC loyalists also joined the fighting and rioting (McKittrick and McVea 54). Violence continued to escalate on both sides, but there were also political attempts to resolve the issues. In 1970, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, dedicated to promoting the nationalist cause through peaceful means, was formed and led by Gerry Fitt and John Hume (64). The IRA, however, also had a politically-based group, less inclined toward

peaceful processes than the SDLP: Sinn Fein. Both the IRA and Sinn Fein had split into groups of Official and Provisional by 1970 (249).

One particularly infamous event of the Troubles is known as “Bloody Sunday.” During an illegal but allegedly peaceful civil rights march in Londonderry on January 30, 1972, soldiers shot at the demonstrators, resulting in fourteen deaths (76). This tragedy served to unite the nationalists, and IRA involvement significantly increased (77). There was an overwhelming sense that the nationalists had been treated unjustly, and despite previous views that the IRA’s method of terrorism was not the appropriate vehicle for achieving nationalist goals, the frustration with the government involvement in and response to Bloody Sunday was instrumental in the escalation of violence. Though the violent acts occurred on both sides, the IRA attacks intensified. However, in June of that year, the IRA called a ceasefire in order to be involved in talks with the government; when they were met with little success, the ceasefire ended in July (254). Then on July 21, 1972, IRA bombs killed nine people in an event known as Bloody Friday. In addition to the casualties, one hundred thirty people were injured in the detonation of twenty bombs in a short period of time (87). Both Bloody Sunday and Bloody Friday were instrumental in influencing public perceptions of the various factions.

In May of 1974, the Ulster Defence Association, a loyalist organization, in conjunction with the Ulster Workers Council, went on strike for about two weeks (103). It was detrimental to the welfare of Belfast, as the workers at the electricity stations were primarily Protestant, and the strikers also blockaded many roads throughout the area (103). The purpose of the strike was to oppose Sunningdale, which was a 1973 agreement between the British, Irish, and Northern Irish political leaders and

government officials to share power between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland (“Sunningdale Agreement”). It is likely that because the strike successfully thwarted Sunningdale, the peace process was delayed.

The protests and demonstrations also took place in Long Kesh prison, or the Maze, among the political prisoners (McKittrick and McVea 137). Political prisoners had sought special status, and after a hungerstrike, in 1972, it was granted to them. However, under new leadership in 1975, the political prisoner status was going to be revoked in 1976, so the prisoners resisted with various strikes (138-41). First, there was a blanket strike, in which they refused to wear the prison uniforms and were then forced to be naked and cover up with blankets (138-41). This strike was followed by a “dirty protest,” in which the prisoners did not clean out their chamber pots and left their excrement on the walls and floor, and eventually the prisoners resorted to another hungerstrike (138-41). There were two mostly unsuccessful hungerstrikes: one in 1980, and then a second in 1981 (141-47). These resulted in the deaths of ten people, including the well-publicized death of Bobby Sands, who, during his imprisonment and the hungerstrike, had been elected as an MP as a Sinn Fein propaganda tool (141-47).

The Troubles of Northern Ireland: Working Toward Resolution

Part of the reason that the peace process was slow in coming was that there were so many different factions within the main groups. The two major sides were the loyalists and unionists (Protestants) and the opposing nationalists (Catholics). However, within the nationalists, there were several major groupings and many smaller groups. The Social Democratic and Labour Party wanted peace through political means and civil rights movements. The Irish Republican Army and Sinn Fein, by contrast, were willing to

use violent means. Sinn Fein was the political part of the organization, and the IRA was the paramilitary component. Additionally, there were groups such as the Irish National Liberation Army and their political Irish Republican Socialists, while the IRA and Sinn Fein were both broken into Official and Provisional groups. Both of these groups sided with the nationalists and Catholics, but because of their differing views on how to achieve their goals, they were often unable to work together. Similarly, there was considerable division on the loyalist side. The main political party was the Ulster Unionist party, and it was the party in power for much of the twentieth century. There were other Unionist parties, however, such as the United Ulster Unionist Council parties, that were more opposed to power sharing (333). Then there were the loyalist paramilitary groups and connected political parties, such as the Ulster Defence Association (or Ulster Freedom Fighters) and its political party, the Ulster Democratic Party, and the Ulster Volunteer Force (which was an illegal group during most of the Troubles) and its political party, the Progressive Unionist Party, the Ulster Protestant Volunteers, the Ulster Workers Council, the Loyalist Volunteer Force, the Democratic Unionist Party, and several other groups; the Combined Loyalist Military Command group encompassed the UDA, UVF, and other smaller groups (328-33). The British government was also involved in the political process, particularly through the Northern Ireland Office during direct rule (330). The Royal Ulster Constabulary was the police force, and though it was not a political or paramilitary group, it was part of the government and was often attacked by the IRA because of their alleged partiality toward the unionists and loyalists. Irish government also was involved in the peace process because of its interest in Northern Ireland. The Irish government is led by the

Taoiseach, who is equivalent to the Prime Minister, and run by a parliament, called the Dail; its major parties are Fianna Fail and Fine Gael (328). With this complicated web of ideas and interests, in which each group had varying levels of actual political involvement, it is understandable that inter-party discussions took a long time to come to agreement.

One important part of the attempts at resolution was the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, in which British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Irish Taoiseach Garrett FitzGerald agreed that the Irish Republic would have a part in the political decisions regarding Northern Ireland, though Northern Ireland would remain under British control unless the majority of Northern Ireland determined otherwise (“Anglo-Irish Agreement”). This agreement represented considerable progress in British and Irish relations, but the unionists of Northern Ireland, concerned that they would be no longer under British authority, were upset by this agreement, prolonging the resolution.

In the 1990s, there were several IRA ceasefires, including an extended period from August 1994 to February 1996 (McKittrick and McVea 293-99). The CMLC also called a ceasefire in October of 1994 (295). After the IRA ceasefire had ended in 1996, another began in July 1997; in the interim periods, though, there had been many IRA attacks (299-303). Nevertheless, the ceasefires were an indication that perhaps peace was a possibility in the near future.

In the midst of a period of increased violence, the peace process progressed until an agreement was reached on April 10, 1998, and the referendum was passed on May 22, 1998 (*The Good Friday Agreement*). The contents of the agreement explain the new system of government and address human rights concerns, reconciliation, security,

and the justice system, including the treatment of political prisoners (*The Good Friday Agreement*). The new government would have an assembly with 108 members to make local decisions while still under the British government, with the intent of gradually giving more power to the Northern Irish government; there would also be a unionist First Minister and a nationalist Deputy First Minister, with several other ministers over departments, that would all have to work together to reach agreements with both groups (McKittrick and McVea 220). This agreement is considered more or less the end of the period known as the Troubles, as it involved substantial concurrence from all major groups.

Even though a peace agreement was reached, it took several years for the violence to truly start to come to an end. The most violent attack of the Troubles occurred August 15, 1998, killing twenty-nine people (Hammer 64-73). According to an article, "Getting Past the Troubles," written in 2009 by Joshua Hammer, "peace walls" are still separating neighborhoods, but the political state was improved, as the leader of Sinn Fein, Martin McGuinness, and the former leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, Ian Paisley, were working together, symbolic of improvement in loyalist and nationalist relations (64-73). Still, the tensions have not totally subsided; in 2011 there was an outbreak of rioting in east Belfast, attributed to the Ulster Volunteer Force ("Unrest in Northern Ireland: The Bogeymen Return: An Outbreak of Rioting in Belfast"). However, there was a hopeful report in *The Economist* on June 30, 2012 about increased cooperation between the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein, even concerning relations with Britain ("Politics in Northern Ireland"). Overall, the situation is promising,

but it will be difficult to fully overcome the tensions created by Northern Ireland's troubled history.

Seamus Heaney: A Brief Biography

Seamus Heaney was born on April 13, 1939 on a Derry farm (O'Donoghue xiii). Even as a Catholic in a primarily Protestant community, he experienced very little discrimination growing up, and his parents were on friendly terms with their Protestant neighbors (O'Driscoll 18). His growing up on a farm in a family with seven children, of which he was the oldest, is reflected in his poetry, particularly in his earlier work. His primary schooling was at the local Anahorish school, and the student population was comprised of both Catholics and Protestants (O'Donoghue xiii). He then attended St. Columb's College; during his time there, his much younger brother died, and the Heaney family moved (xiii). He graduated from Queen's University Belfast in 1961 and then studied to become a teacher at St. Joseph's College; he later taught at an intermediate school in Ballymurphy (xiii). Heaney then became a lecturer at St. Joseph's (xiv).

During this time at St. Joseph's, Heaney became involved with a group of poets, including Michael Longley, Stewart Parker, James Simmons, Frank Ormsby, Paul Muldoon, and Derek Mahon, which was known as the Belfast Group (xiv). Originally led by Philip Hobsbaum, the group met from 1963 until 1970. According to Hobsbaum,

I was told by more than one person that Catholics and Protestants would never meet under one roof--for any purpose. The Belfast Group, among its other achievements, proved these ill-wishers wrong...[But] I had little idea

of the ground I was breaking when I invited people from both Catholic and Protestant communities, or from no community at all, to take part. (173-74)

The group met to discuss their poetry, and despite their religious and political differences, the members were able to focus on that goal.

In 1965, Heaney married Marie Devlin, and together they had three children: Michael, born in 1966, Christopher, born in 1968, and Catherine Ann, born in 1973, months after their 1972 move from Northern Ireland to Wicklow in the Irish Republic, following a year at Berkeley (O'Donoghue xiv-xv). In 1975, Heaney began teaching at Carysfort in Dublin, where he eventually became the Head of the English Department until 1981 (O'Donoghue xvi). During this time, he also began his relationship with Harvard, where he taught a seminar, which resulted in a five-year contract with Harvard for one semester a year (xvii). After fulfilling this contract, he became Harvard's Boylston Chair of Rhetoric and Oratory (1984-1996) (xvii). From 1989 until 1994, Heaney was also Professor of Poetry at Oxford (xvii).

Seamus Heaney received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995 for his "lyrical beauty and ethical depth which exalt everyday miracles and the living past" (1). His poetry collections include *Eleven Poems* (1965), *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door in the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975), *Field Work* (1979), *Station Island* (1984), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), *Seeing Things* (1991), *The Spirit Level* (1996), *Electric Light* (2001), *District and Circle* (2006), several volumes of selections from the works (xiv-xvii), and most recently, in 2010, *Human Chain* ("Seamus Heaney"). Additionally, Heaney did translation work, such as *Sweeney Astray* (1983) (a translation of *Buile Suibhne*), *The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles's 'Philoctetes'* (1990), *Beowulf*

(1999), and *The Burial at Thebes* (2004) (a translation of *Antigone*) (O'Donoghue xvii-xviii). His literary criticism, Oxford lectures, and Nobel lecture have also been published (xvii). He is a prolific poet and scholar.

Seamus Heaney: The Troubles and Poetry

Seamus Heaney did not deny that the Troubles influenced his poetry, as he wrote several poems specifically about it; he did not, however, frequently make political statements. Still, growing up Catholic in Northern Ireland had an impact, not that “the simple fact of belonging to the minority made [him] a poet; but...once a literary aspiration developed, it took account of the hurtful conditions” (qtd. in O’Driscoll 65). Of his early work’s relationship to his Catholic background, he says, “I wasn’t consciously writing from a Catholic perspective, but undoubtedly the work was affected by the bonding....Even though there was no sectarian talk or prejudice at home, there was still an indignation at the political status quo. We knew...that Ulster wasn’t meant for us, that the British connection was meant to displace us” (O’Driscoll 66). Growing up in rural Derry, the primary indications of any nationalist attitudes in his family were their use of “Derry” as opposed to “Londonderry” and their avoidance of singing “God Save the Queen” (134-35); the rural farm community he grew up in was not particularly torn apart from the tensions.

As the tensions worsened, Heaney became more aware of the Troubles and began to consciously write about the situation. He did not make it the focus of most of his poems, but he did not feel that he could ignore the political turmoil either. Despite staying out of politics for the most part, his articles and a television program he had done were enough to prompt Ian Paisley to refer to him as a “well-known Papist propagandist,” suggest that he was “corrupting the minds of the Ulster’s Unionist youth,” and say of Heaney’s move to Wicklow that he was “a good riddance, having gone to [his] spiritual home in the Popish Republic,” according to Heaney’s account of the

incident (qtd. in O'Driscoll 149). Some Republicans too were frustrated with Heaney for what he did not say for their cause, as illustrated by an incident on a train when a prominent member of Sinn Fein lectured him about it (257-58). The political situation in Northern Ireland was complicated to navigate.

In an interview with Heaney, O'Driscoll referred to Heaney's explanation of his stance on writing about politics from "Place and Displacement," summarizing it as "your generation of writers felt it was not necessary to deal directly with political issues because 'the subtleties and tolerances of their art were precisely what they had to contribute to the coarseness and intolerances of public life,'" to which Heaney responded that he still agreed with that idea: "All of us probably had some notion that a good poem was 'a paradigm of good politics', a site of energy and tension and possibility, a truth-telling arena but not a killing field. And without being explicit about it... we probably felt that if we as poets couldn't do something transformative or creative... it was a poor lookout for everybody" (qtd. in O'Driscoll 123). Heaney did not view the poet's purpose as a political one.

However, he did not deny the importance of writing about political events; instead he viewed his contribution to be subtlety that contrasted with the polarized political situation. The effect of the Troubles on poetry is easier to assess than the reverse: the effect of poetry on the political situation, according to Heaney. About this influence, he said, "Those hoary old chestnuts about the relationship of literature to life lost their hoar and were all of a sudden new again. But it's also worth remembering that in the plain, day-to-day reality, poetry born from our predicament in Northern Ireland was being

taught during the Troubles to schoolchildren and students born on both sides of the divide” (qtd. in O’Driscoll 383). That, conversely, was poetry’s influence on the Troubles.

Heaney was in some ways personally affected by the Troubles, despite not living in Northern Ireland for the majority of the conflict. Friends, a family member, and family members of his friends died in related violence. His father’s cousin’s son, Colum McCartney, was killed by Loyalists; a friend, Louis O’Neill, was killed when the bar he was in was bombed; and several others, including some of his earlier students, died as a result of the Troubles (220-22).

Seamus Heaney’s Poetry

As established by Heaney’s explanation of the responsibility of poets in political situations, his poetry is not entirely about the Troubles. That said, some of his poems, such as “Requiem for the Croppies,” “Punishment,” and “Casualty,” discuss the Troubles and related concerns. Throughout each of the three poems, and in other poems relating to the Troubles, Heaney, while identifying with the Catholic side in some respects, does not advocate violence or the divisiveness of the conflict. In “Tracing Seamus Heaney,” Kieran Quinlan quotes Heaney as saying “I never think of the Unionist community in Northern Ireland, nor the Nationalist community. My head doesn’t operate in those terms. The writers of my generation, from the Protestant and Catholic side, all thought of ourselves as transcending those things. The desire was to get through the thicket, not to represent it.” For Heaney, poetry is not about making a political statement or representing a political side; he endeavors to write about the political situation because he cannot ignore it. These are by no means his only poems about the Troubles, and it would be misguided to limit the significance of these poems

to the Troubles. It is also ill-advised to interpret poetry wholly from a historical perspective because literature is more than the product of a time period or event; however, the influence of the political events in Seamus Heaney's poetry is evident, and he himself recognizes this fact.

“Requiem for the Croppies”

“Requiem for the Croppies” was published as part of *Door into the Dark* in 1969. The poem concerns the 1798 rebellion at Vinegar Hill (Vendler 21). While this piece does not explicitly state anything about the contemporary politics or the IRA, it aligns with the nationalist perspective as it commemorates the nationalist side of an event almost two hundred years prior. The final lines of the poem suggest that those who died had not been properly remembered: “They buried us without shroud or coffin/ And in August the barley grew up out of the grave” (Heaney 23). In recognizing the failed efforts of the deceased croppies, Heaney writes against recorded history, giving the rebels significance and portraying the fallen as brave heroes, “shaking scythes at cannon” (23).

Of “Requiem for the Croppies,” Heaney says, “There was an element of transgression in celebrating the Croppies in official Ulster in 1966” (qtd. in O’Driscoll 90). It is a powerfully nationalist poem, so much so that Heaney eventually stopped reading it publicly as to avoid being associated with the IRA, which was not his intent for the work (118). Concerning the purpose behind his poem, he said, “[It] hadn’t been written as a recruiting song for the IRA. No way. In the Northern Ireland context, its purpose is to exercise the rights of nationalists to have freedom of cultural speech, as it were. To make space in the official Ulster lexicon for Vinegar Hill as well as the Boyne

and the Somme” (qtd. in O’Driscoll 118). The poem, to Heaney, is about recognition of the Catholic nationalists as significant players in the history and politics of Northern Ireland. In a New Historicism vein, Heaney is giving the previously disenfranchised and defeated a voice in Northern Irish history.

According to Jason Hall, in his article “Heaney’s ‘Requiem for the Croppies,’” the form of the poem also suggests subversiveness . Hall says that the poem’s similarities with the form of the English sonnet highlight the difference: “Both Heaney’s slightly out-of-kilter quatrains and his refusal to maintain strict coherence between form and subject matter reflect the disorderly ranks of the Irish revolutionaries. The result is an undermining of the ranks of the English sonnet” (57). This idea of going against the English would be synchronous with Heaney’s ideas. He did not agree with the way Catholics were treated by the English Protestants throughout Northern Ireland’s history, though his later poems illustrate that he would not be an advocate of IRA violence either.

Another element of “Requiem for the Croppies” that can be explored is the agricultural references. As it begins and ends with barley, there is a sense of a cycle. Helen Vendler refers to the new life on the graves as a “resurrection-motif,” and, in light of that, “the Croppies resemble a vegetation-god” (22). According to Daniel Xerri, “[T]he land plays an important role as a preserver of history and what might be seen as a sense of rebellion and anger” (25). The agricultural theme is also significant because much of the tension and fighting between Catholics and Protestants was in part related to division of the land; land’s prominent place in this poem in part illustrates the overarching conflict. Russell interprets the agricultural elements differently, writing,

“[T]he image of sprouting barley [lends] a hopeful air to poem” (192). The growth of plants after the battle can be seen as a symbol of renewal or rebirth.

This early poem of Heaney’s reveals his nationalist interests and his concern for the voice of the Catholics in Northern Ireland. These ideas are clear; he does not, however, align himself with Republican violence, despite the later interpretation of his poetry by the public as the political situation worsened. The poem does indicate that Northern Ireland’s circumstances were among Heaney’s concerns even before the violence substantially increased and that through his choice of subject matter, though about an earlier event, the Troubles influenced his poetry.

“Punishment”

“Punishment” is another of Heaney’s poems about an earlier historical event, which he then connects with the contemporary affairs of Northern Ireland. It was published in 1975 in the volume entitled *North*, which features several related poems about the bog people. In 1973, after reading *The Bog People* by P. V. Glob, a Danish archaeologist (Greenblatt 2788), Heaney travelled to Silkeborg, Denmark and saw the Bog people at a museum there (O’Donoghue xv). “Punishment” was inspired by the Windeby Girl (who was, after further study, identified as the Windeby Boy), an early adolescent bog person discovered in 1952 with a leather strap around the neck, a blindfold, and evidence of scalping (Sanders 115). With the understanding that this bog person was a female, Heaney crafted a comparison between the Windeby Girl, who had been, it was speculated, punished for adultery, and the Catholic girls that had been punished for having relationships with British soldiers (Russell 219). John Wilson Foster explains that “Heaney notoriously pictured himself as standing by as Catholic girls in

Northern Ireland were punished by their own side for fraternising with British soldiers (they were chained to church railings and had tar poured over their heads.)” (216). The poem begins by describing her executed body: the halter and the wind whipping her as she hangs there, then her burial in the bog, with her shamed and shaved head and the blindfold and noose still on her body. Only after her body is described and the narrator switches mid-stanza to addressing the girl does the reader learn of her crime: adultery. As the narrator addresses her, he tells her she was beautiful, and he apologizes for how he would not have stood up for her. It is the last two stanzas that connect the poem to the Troubles: “I who have stood dumb/ when your betraying sisters,/ cauled in tar,/ wept by the railings,/ who would connive/ in civilized outrage/ yet understand the exact/ and tribal, intimate revenge” (Heaney ll.37-44). The bog girl is seen as analogous to the modern women who were humiliated and punished by being tarred.

Regarding this comparison, Xerri explains that the narrator is “consenting to the punishment without actually participating in it, perhaps due to his realisation that when seen in the overall picture, this is a fundamental way of showing support for his country’s struggle” (64). Other critics, though, interpret this silence differently: “There are three criminal acts inventoried in the poem: the first is standing silent while ‘punishment’ is carried out; the second is ‘conniving’ in hypocritical condemnation of the act; and the third is the punishment itself, as the tribe takes its vengeance” (Vendler 50). Vendler then asks, “Can it be, Heaney proposes, that what we are seeing is not Catholics against Protestants, or rich against poor, or loyalist against nationalist, but rather a generalized cultural approval of violence, dating back many centuries?” (51). Vendler’s analysis interprets Heaney as now speaking out against the ancient violence,

in contrast to Xerri, who interprets Heaney as still accepting the violence for the benefit of the cause. Andrew Foley's ideas are along the same lines as Xerri's, as he points out the use of the word "understand" in reference to the actions toward the Catholic girls that were punished (67). Still, Heaney's persona in the poem admits responsibility for his inaction, and though he says that he "understand[s]," the tone of the poem does not celebrate the actions against the girls.

Heaney's own statements regarding the poem indicate that while there is a clear relation to the political situation, he is not intending to be "addressing the situation in Northern Ireland," even though he feels the context is important (O'Driscoll 159). Heaney explains that his point in writing the bog poems was to focus on the "biological right to life" when figuring out "[how] to take a stand between the tar-black face of the peat-bog girl and the tarred and feathered women in the news reports" (159). Heaney's political views toward the violence perpetrated by both sides is that neither side is justified in violence, even though he is a nationalist. This poem could be interpreted as Heaney apologizing for his part in the violence, as he was silent, and now, through "Punishment," he is speaking out against it, despite the poem's subtleties.

"Casualty"

Written about the death of a friend, Louis O'Neill, "Casualty" was published in *Field Work* in 1979. Heaney describes O'Neill as "a regular customer at [his] father-in-law's public house...a small farmer and eel fisherman. The kind of level-headed, low-key, humorous countryman [he] always felt at home with" (qtd. in O'Driscoll 214). Heaney had talked to him many times at the bar and had even gone with him to Lough Neagh to lift eel lines, so O'Neill's death from the bombing of another bar after curfew

because of Bloody Sunday, possibly an IRA action or a UVF one, was an especially personal tragedy for Heaney (214).

Part I of the poem establishes Heaney and O'Neill's relationship: the two often talked at the bar, and despite their differences, Heaney's life as a poet and O'Neill's life as a fisherman, the two formed a friendship. The section concludes with O'Neill's death because of the after-curfew bombing. The curfew was imposed because of Bloody Sunday, which was the violence that occurred during a demonstration intended to be peaceful, ultimately resulting in the deaths of fourteen people. The second section of the poem discusses the funerals for the victims that day, "coffin after coffin," and then explains that the reason O'Neill was out past curfew was because he needed a drink. Heaney asks "How culpable was he/ That last night when he broke/ Our tribe's complicity?" and poses it as though it was O'Neill asking Heaney about it (ll.78-80). Essentially, O'Neill's intent in breaking curfew was not to break unity with the nationalists and their mourning but simply to have a drink, and he wonders in the poem why he was held responsible and punished in this incident. The last part of the poem describes the somber funeral, even though Heaney did not attend, and then Heaney recalls their time fishing together on Lough Neagh. "Casualty" illustrates the injustice of death, as O'Neill, though going against the curfew, was not the enemy, and beautifully questions the injustice of it as well.

Quinlan claims, while discussing another poem, "An Ulster Twilight" that "Casualty," in addition to "An Ulster Twilight," communicates the idea that "the personal and the esthetic can partially transcend such conditions and must be recognized as doing so," in reference to the political situation in Northern Ireland . In other words,

Quinlan considers “Casualty” and other poems to discuss how while the political situation affects daily life, the individual may make decisions for personal reasons beyond acting in association with the beliefs of his or her side. While Louis O’Neill was going against the curfew imposed by his side, it was his intent to get a drink, not to make a political statement.

Russell connects the lines from the second stanza, “How culpable was he/ That last night when he broke/ Our tribe’s complicity?” (Heaney ll.78-80), with the idea of tribal solidarity in “Punishment,” explaining the contrast between O’Neill’s actions in breaking curfew and the “brothers in a ring” at the funeral for the victims of Bloody Sunday (Russell 240-41). As Heaney questions the violence in this poem, and as he criticizes his own silence in “Punishment,” the idea of the importance of solidarity with a side that uses violence, especially against their own, even for the sake of protection of the goals, is also questioned.

Explanation of Display Design

Following Mark Schaeffer’s steps for creating a library display in *Library Displays Handbook*, I have created a library display for books about the Troubles. The first step is to “identify a need” (156). In this instance my goal or my need for the display was similar to one of Schaeffer’s goals: “to increase awareness of important events (current or historical) and to encourage use of the library to find out more about those events” (157). The next step is to “pick a theme or a specific subject,” which is essentially to narrow down the goal identified in the first step (157). Specifically, my goal for this display is to “increase awareness” about the Troubles by including books for several different age groups so that families can learn about the Troubles together and discuss

what they have learned as a family. I think it is important for families to discuss world problems so that children can learn about conflicts under the guidance of their parents in the hopes that they might learn more about peace.

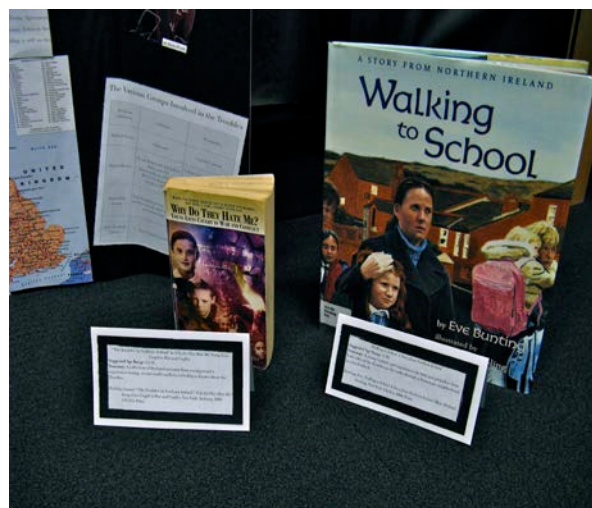
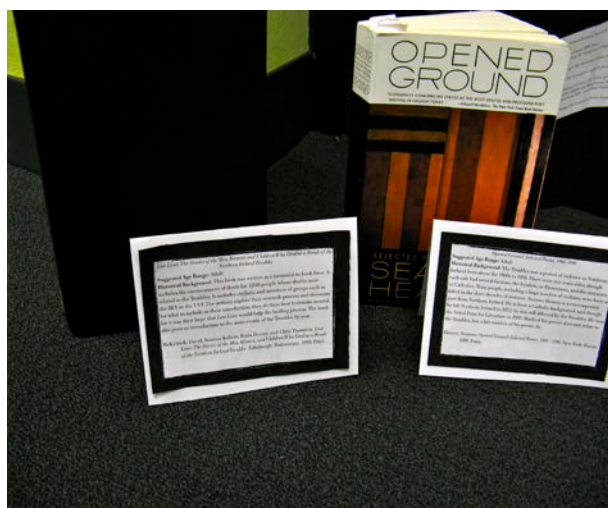
The third step Schaeffer outlines is to “find an appropriate space” (158). For this project, I am designing a small display that could easily travel from library to library. I am including four books in the display, in part because there are not many books about the Troubles that are focused on the more personal aspects of the Troubles rather than on the political aspects of the Troubles, and in part because I wanted the display to be smaller so that it could easily move around the libraries in an area. Because of the display’s smaller size and because it is intended to travel, finding a place for it is a step that will be skipped.

The fourth step is to “write the text of the display” (159). This step relates to Susan P. Phillips’ practice of researching the subject that will be the focus of the display because in order to write helpful, informative text about the subject, it is necessary to be informed about the subject. In the instance of my display, I had already researched the Troubles for the other components of my project. I used the information I had gathered and expanded the brief historical background I had already written for the reading guides as the central text for the display. I also used a chart that I had made for a presentation about the Troubles that explained the various groups involved in the Troubles (see Fig. 1). I thought it would be important to include that information on the display because that was the most confusing part of my research, and the chart would also help illustrate why the conflict was so complicated and difficult to resolve. I also wrote a works cited list for the display, including the books on display, the sources of the

images, and the source of the information that I included in the introductory paragraph and chart. Next to the books in the display, I also included labels with information about suggested age range and summaries of the books that I had already written for the literature guides so that people looking at the books would have information about them readily available (see Figs. 2 and 3).

Religious Affiliations	Catholics	Protestants
National Origins	Nationalist	Loyalist, Unionist
Political Parties	Irish Democratic and Labour Party (socialist), Irish Republican Army (IRA), Irish Republican Socialist Party (I.R.S.P.)	Ulster Unionist Party, United Ulster Unionist Party, Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Democratic Unionist Party
Paramilitary Groups	Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Provisional IRA (PIRA), Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)	Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), Ulster Defence Association (UDA)
Other Groups	Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), British Army, British Security Forces Agency (BSFA)	

Fig. 1. Photograph of chart about groups involved in the Troubles.



Figs. 2 and 3. Photographs of books with explanatory labels.

After writing the text, the next step is to “select books that fit in with the display,” though I had already completed this step when I wrote the text of the display because I

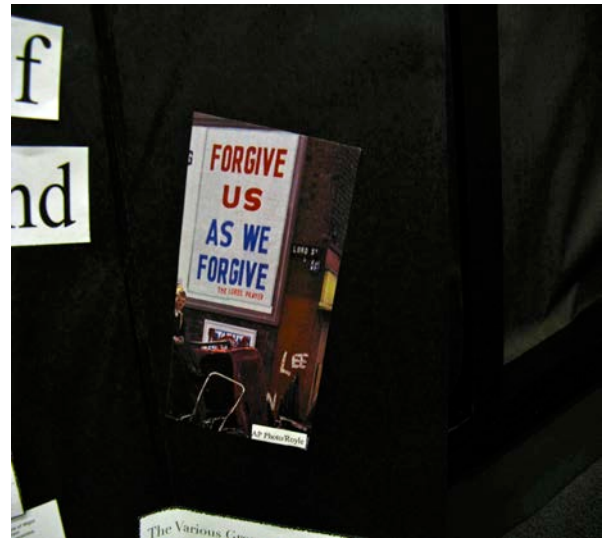
wrote labels for the books (159). Several copies of literature guides for each of the books in the display would be included next to the display. These literature guides were written with intent of providing questions for families to discuss the Troubles. Through family discussions of the books with questions aimed at forming personal connections with text, it is my hope that both children and adults would learn about the conflict and then want to work toward promoting peace in conflicts around the world.

I chose Eve Bunting's *Walking to School: A Story from Northern Ireland* because it explains and discusses the Troubles in a way elementary school children can understand. It is important to teach children about conflicts in the world at an early age so that as they grow up, they can see a need for working toward peace in their own lives and in the world. The next book that I chose was a collection of short stories and personal narratives entitled *Why Do They Hate Me? Young Lives Caught in War and Conflict*, compiled by Laurel Holliday. It has several sections about other conflicts, but the accompanying literature guides focus on the section about the Troubles. It is written for teenagers and young adults, as the people who wrote the stories were reflecting on their experiences when they were younger. David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney, and Chris Thornton collaborated to create *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women, and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*, which gives an account of each of the over 3,600 deaths; it is non-fiction and is also a memorial in book form. I included this book because it is a sobering reminder of the number of deaths, not only the deaths of those involved in the conflict, but also of a large number of civilians. I also included Seamus Heaney's *Opened Ground: Selected Poems, 1966 – 1996*. While not all of his poems are about the Troubles, the poems

concerning the conflict are poignant. These texts are focused on individuals' experiences, both fictional and factual, and because of this, these works can be used to encourage people to learn about the Troubles in a way that is more approachable and personal than reading more politically-focused accounts of the events, though political accounts are an important resource for understanding the Troubles as well. In order to help readers reflect on these books in a constructive and personal way, the literature guides' questions highlight the personal nature of the books. The literature guides are reproduced in the section that follows.

The final step is to "design and produce the display" (159). Much of this process happened simultaneously while writing the text, as I had already written much of the text beforehand for other components of the project. I also included two pictures from the Associated Press, along with photo credits (see Figs. 4 and 5), and a map of the United Kingdom and Ireland, with an arrow pointing to Northern Ireland (see Fig. 6). The two photos from the Associated Press were from Troubles coverage: one was of British soldiers after a riot, and the other was of a small boy sitting on a wrecked car next to a mural that said "Forgive us as we forgive," referencing the Lord's Prayer (Royle). I chose these photos because I thought the first one, showing soldiers and wrecked cars, illustrated the tension and destruction, and the second one showed the same destruction, but with a sense of hope because of the mural in the background. The map was not solely focused on Northern Ireland because I felt it was important to show its proximity to the United Kingdom as well as its location on the same island as Ireland. In order to draw attention to Northern Ireland, I cut out a large red arrow pointing to its location. I had considered including elements of green and orange in the display to

represent each side of the conflict but then decided on black because I wanted the display to focus on the resolution of the conflict and the remembrance of those who died in the conflict rather than highlighting the division through the bright and symbolic colors.



Figs. 4 and 5. Associated Press photographs from news coverage during the Troubles on the book display.

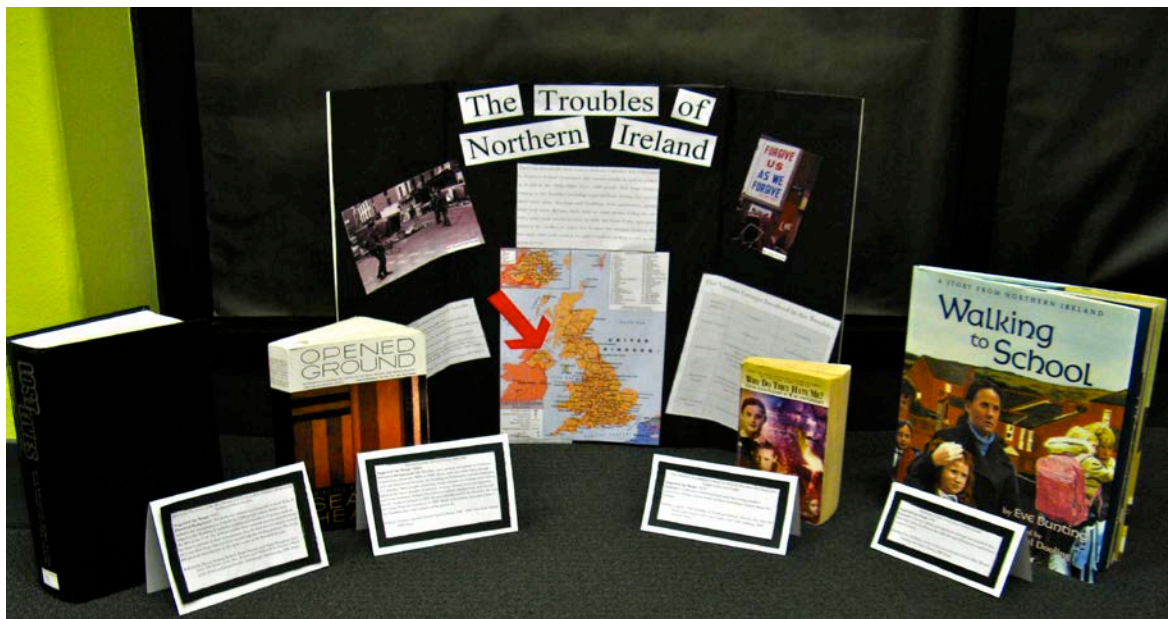


Fig. 6. Photograph of the display.

Literature Guide for *Walking to School: A Story from Northern Ireland*

Bunting, Eve. *Walking to School: A Story from Northern Ireland*. Illus. Michael Dooling.

New York: Clarion, 2008. Print.

Suggested Age Range: 6-10

Summary: A young Catholic girl experiences the hate and prejudice from both sides of the Troubles as she walks through a Protestant neighborhood to attend school.

Historical Background: There has historically been tension between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Sometimes this tension results in violent conflict, as it did in the 1960s-1990s. Both sides share responsibility for the violence of the Troubles. In 1998, the Good Friday Agreement resolved the conflict on paper, but the healing process is a gradual one, so tensions from the conflict still exist.

Reading Questions:

How would you feel if people lined the streets to yell at you on your way to school?

How would you respond to an act of kindness amidst the rudeness? Do you think you would be able to be kind to someone else even though everyone else was being mean?

Allison realizes that both sides share some responsibility for the problems: the Protestants taunt the Catholic school children, but her Uncle Frank helped to hurt Liam because he was friendly with Protestants. What are some ways that realizing the responsibility of both sides can help resolve conflict?

Literature Guide for *Why Do They Hate Me? Young Lives Caught in War and Conflict*

Holliday, Laurel. "The Troubles' in Northern Ireland." *Why Do They Hate Me? Young Lives Caught in War and Conflict*. New York: Archway, 1999. 133-212. Print.

Suggested Age Range: 12-18

Summary: A collection of firsthand accounts from young people's experiences during the Troubles.

Historical Background: There has historically been tension between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Sometimes this tension results in violent conflict, as it did in the 1960s-1990s. Both sides share responsibility for the violence of the Troubles. In 1998, the Good Friday Agreement resolved the conflict on paper, but the healing process is a gradual one, so tensions from the conflict still exist. The book includes a more in-depth explanation.

Reading Questions:

Which story did you find the most poignant? Why?

Note the wide range of experiences from both sides of the conflict. What do these stories have in common?

Literature Guide for *Lost Lives*

McKittrick, David, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney, and Chris Thornton. *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women, and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*. Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1999. Print.

Suggested Age Range: Adult

Historical Background: This book was written as a memorial in book form. It includes the circumstances of death for 3,638 people whose deaths were related to the Troubles. It includes civilians and members of groups such as the IRA or the UVF. The authors explain their research process and decisions for what to include in their introduction; they do their best to remain neutral, for it was their hope that *Lost Lives* would help the healing process. The book also gives an introduction to the main events of the Troubles by year.

Reading Questions:

After reading the introduction, how difficult do you think it would be to fairly retell each death? After reading some of the entries, how well do you think they accomplished their goal?

In the statistics section on page 1480, it shows that 2,037 of the deaths were civilians. Read through some of the entries and note the frequency of civilian deaths. How do you think the lives of people not directly involved in the Troubles were affected? How would you feel knowing that even if you remained uninvolved in the conflict, you were in danger too?

Literature Guide for *Opened Ground*

Heaney, Seamus. *Opened Ground: Selected Poems, 1966 - 1996*. New York: Farrar, 1998. Print.

Suggested Age Range: High school to adult

Historical Background: The Troubles was a period of violence in Northern Ireland from about the 1960s to 1998. There were two main sides, though each side had several factions: the loyalists, or Protestants, and the unionists, or Catholics. Many people, including a large number of civilians, were hurt or killed in the three decades of violence. Seamus Heaney is a contemporary poet from Northern Ireland. He is from a Catholic background, and though he left Northern Ireland in 1972, he was still affected by the Troubles. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. Much of his poetry does not relate to the Troubles, but a fair number of his poems do.

Reading Questions:

Read "Punishment" on pages 112-13. In this poem, Heaney compares the hypothetical cause of death of a bog person (body preserved in the bog centuries ago) to the treatment of women who were considered traitors for having relationships with men from the opposing side. What point do you think Heaney is trying to make in this poem?

Read "Casualty" on pages 147-50. This poem is about the death of Louis O'Neill, Heaney's friend who died after an explosion at a bar after the curfew imposed following Bloody Sunday. What point do you think Heaney is trying to make in this poem?

Read through more of Heaney's poetry. Can you see how the Troubles has had some influencing on his writing?

Conclusion

The Troubles of Northern Ireland was a terribly violent conflict, with perpetual violence from both sides. The conflict is officially over, and there is now hope for the future, but there remains tension, as is understandable, given that the origins of the conflict are rooted in English colonization, arguably dating back from the twelfth century. The political nature of the conflict is complicated, as even the same sides had differing and conflicting goals and methods for achieving what goals they did have in common. Such hostilities naturally influenced the writings Northern Ireland produced, including the poetry of Seamus Heaney. Though he was not particularly politically involved and does not see his art as a mechanism for disseminating political views, his work wrestles with the questions of political involvement and criticizes the violence committed by both sides.

The influence on his poetry is not limited to “Requiem for the Croppies,” “Punishment,” and “Casualty,” but extends further into much of his work, even though he should not be characterized as a Troubles poet. His poetry deals with many other themes, and while the poetry about violence was mostly written concerning the Troubles, there is greater depth to his work than mere political statements. “Requiem for the Croppies” shows his nationalist views, as he gives the defeated deceased a voice, but Heaney illustrates in his poetry that his bigger issue with the Troubles was the violence on both sides. In “Punishment and “Casualty” he asks why the nationalists attacked their own side, even for the protection of their cause, and in “Punishment,” he considers his silence a part of the problem. The concept of a poet’s responsibility in dealing with political conflict is evident in Seamus Heaney’s poetry, and his poetry

reflects his stance on this matter. Through learning about the violence committed by both sides of the conflict, it becomes clear that the Troubles is a very complicated conflict; Heaney's poetry, as well as other literature, embraces peace through showing that the fault is on both sides, and the Troubles affected not just those directly involved in the violence.

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