Seamus Heaney
Birth

- Seamus Heaney was born on 13\textsuperscript{th} April, 1939.
- He was born at the family farmhouse, called Mossbawn, between Castledawson and Toomebridge, thirty miles to the north-west of Belfast, in Northern Ireland.
- He is the eldest of nine children.
- When he was a young boy his family moved to Bellaghy, a few miles away, which is now the family home.
Northern Ireland
Childhood

• The son of a farmer, Heaney was brought up in a rural environment, and this can be seen to have a strong influence on many of his poems, such as “Blackberry Picking” and “Death of a Naturalist”
• He was educated initially at Anahorish Primary School, but went on to win a scholarship to St Columb’s College, then a Catholic boarding school in Derry.
• While studying at St Columb's, his four-year-old brother Christopher was killed in a road accident, an event that he would later write about in two poems: "Mid-Term Break" and "The Blackbird of Glanmore".
Education

- When he was 18, Heaney travelled to Belfast to study English Language and Literature at the Queen’s University of Belfast. He graduated in 1961 with a First Class Honours degree.
- Later he went on to train as an English teacher, during which time he was introduced to the work of the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh.
- It was at this time that he first started to publish poetry, beginning in 1962.
Heaney the Poet

- Heaney went on to produce many collections of poems.
- The first, *Death of a Naturalist*, was published in 1966, when he was aged 37.
- His more recent work, *District and Circle*, named after two rail lines on the London Underground, was published in 2006, when Heaney was aged 77.
- He died on August 30th, 2013.
Heaney’s Poetry

• Heaney’s poetry is often autobiographical, dealing with his personal experiences of life, although these experiences often allude to themes of broader significance.

• Some of the themes that commonly occur in Heaney’s poetry are:
  – Writing and Language
  – Religion/Politics
  – Work and Labor
  – The Loss of Innocence
  – Irish Landscapes and Traditions
  – Heaney’s Personal/Family History
  – Irish History (sometimes Neolithic)
Themes and Motifs

Memory
History
Nature/Landscape
Cycles of Violence
(Celebration of) Work
(Love of) Family
Loss of Innocence
Rebirth/Resurrection
Religion/Faith
Tribalism
Victimization

Digging
Writing
The Father and Son
The Bog/Turf
The Dead/Revenants
--The Bog People
--The Vikings
--The Troubles’ Victims
Brains
(Jars of) Spawn
The Black Glacier