

Adventures of **ENGLISH**



TED HUGHES

Biographical Information - Ted Hughes

Task 1

Use the internet to find the following information about Ted Hughes. Teachers – the answers follow on the next page:

1. Where I was born (in 1930) and grew up?
2. The name of my first wife?
3. Instead of going straight to University, I?
4. I published my first of many collections of poetry in 1957, called?
5. The college I went to, but didn't enjoy?
6. I wrote many children's books too; the most popular was?
7. I was offered this job in 1984. I could not refuse?
8. My most controversial collection of poems, exploring my relationship with Sylvia Plath (Sylvia Plath committed suicide in 1963 and many people blamed me for this)?
9. I died here and when?



Answers

1. Where I was born (in 1930) and grew up:
Mytholmroyd, in the Calder Valley, South Yorkshire
2. The name of my first wife:
Sylvia Plath, also a famous writer and poet
3. Instead of going straight to university, I:
 - a. Did my compulsory military service in the RAF
 - b. (Where I learned about Leadership & Communication)
4. I published my first of many collections of poetry in 1957, called:
Hawk in the Rain
5. The college I went to, but didn't enjoy:
Pembroke College, Cambridge
6. I wrote many children's books too; the most popular was:
The Iron Man (it took Organisation to be a successful writer – and Initiative to be a great poet)
7. I was offered this job in 1984. I could not refuse:
Poet Laureate (the Queen's poet or the Leading poet in England)
8. My most controversial collection of poems, exploring my relationship with Sylvia Plath (Sylvia Plath committed suicide in 1963 and many people blamed me for this):
Birthday Letters (this took strength and resilience)
9. I died here and when:
London (1998)

Task 2. Reading Comprehension Text Types

1. This is an extract from *Yorkshire Walks*, a hiking guide.

Read the extract and answer as many of the questions as possible:

...It is important to keep a steady pace while ascending Bodkin Lane; it is pretty steep and is not for the faint hearted. No matter the time of year, it always seems cold here so I would advise wrapping up warm. The landscape is now exposed and there are few trees or hedges to shelter you from the wind. The locals call this 'the stairs' (and you'll know why!) You are approaching the highest elevation of your walk at 1400 feet above sea-level; assuming that it is a clear day you will have a spectacular view of the Calder Valley. In May this area is a perfect place to see and hear swifts; these incredibly fast-moving birds never land or perch, they even sleep 'on the wing'; they make a high-pitched screaming sound when they hunt, usually insects at dusk.

At this point the track levels out and begins to descend towards Baby House Hill Lane. Up ahead and to your left is an old derelict farmhouse where, it is rumoured, Ted Hughes would seek shelter from the rain when revisiting the land of his youth, perhaps even where he composed some of his poetry, much of it inspired by the rugged beauty here. Rest here a while (whether tired or not) and savour the view, as from here on you will be heading down, through Crimsworth Dene woods, past Hardcastle Craggs towards a well-deserved pint of mild in the White Lion at Hebden Bridge where you will always find the warmest Yorkshire welcome...

Questions

1. What do the locals call 'Bodkin Lane'?
2. Why?
3. Why does it always feel so cold at the top of the hill?
4. What kind of view do you get from the top of the hill?
5. What birds might you see here, and why?
6. How would you recognise the sound of these birds?
7. Give two reasons why Ted Hughes might have stopped in the 'derelict farmhouse'.
8. Where is your final destination?
9. What will you do when you arrive? And how will you feel?
10. Can you explain the meaning of the words: 'shelter', 'highest elevation', 'not for the faint-hearted'?

2. This is an extract from *Fairy Places and Secret Creatures – a wildlife field-guide for young myth hunters*.

Read the extract and answer as many of the questions as possible:

...and there snuggled deep down in the heart of the hidden woodland of the Calder valley, beneath the looming Hardcastle Crags and beyond the valleys, cascading ravines, gurgling streams and glorious waterfalls, is the home of the golden stoat. The stoat itself is a rarely seen creature; but the golden or 'moon' stoat is so unusual that the locals (who insist that it really does exist) revere its sighting as a mystical experience. It is said that under the light of the full moon and only under moonlight, this particular stoat appears quite golden. This is not to say that it 'seems' to be golden, but that it does in that moment, by way of some strange valley magic, turn its fur, for that instant, into a pure glossy and golden thread. Should you ever be so fortunate as to see this wondrous creature bathing in the moonlight, framed perhaps in the moving reflection of the Kilty waterfall, down a little way past the Hebbal hollow and along the path that leads away from the old Gibson mill, for example, you will be forever blessed with good fortune. You will never again be in want of money or wealth or riches, although having seen the magical animal and having received its lucky charm, the witness is cursed to be forever obsessed with the experience of that incredible night vision and finds him or herself quite unable to dream of anything else, ever again, than the shimmer of its pelt in the light of the perfect Yorkshire moon.

Questions

1. How do you know the golden stoat is not a common creature?
2. Where might you find this strange animal?
3. What other name is given to the golden stoat? And why?
4. Do you think the stoat's fur really turns to gold? Give reasons for and against.
5. Is the golden stoat dangerous?
6. Can you write directions to find this animal?
7. Seeing the golden stoat is supposed to be good and bad. Why?
8. Would you like to see this creature, if you could?
9. Can you explain the meaning of the words: 'mystical', 'obsessed', 'wondrous'?

Task 3. Extracts

Extract 1

Ted Hughes was known as a writer of many styles, but he is most well-known for his poetry. Many of his early poems explored his interest in, and experiences with, nature and animals.

'Snails' is one of his early poems. It uses simple language and a shape that reflects the behaviour of the animal.

Snails

Out of earliest ooze, old

Even by sea-stone time,

Slimed as eels, wrinkled as whales,

And cold

As dogs' noses,

And slow, sap-slow,

Under their coiled cauls of shells

Snails

Climb

The roses

Form: The poem has 2 stanzas? Not really. But it has a shape or a 'form'. The form is supposed to reflect the movement of the snail – slow and steady. Underline the lines that show the movement of the snails.

Highlight the three similes: Slimed as eels, wrinkled as whales, and cold as dogs' noses. They are simple and 'natural'; is that why they are so effective?

Rhyme: does the poem rhyme? No, but there is lots of assonance 'out of earliest ooze, old'; sibilance: 'dogs noses, and slow sap-slow'; and alliteration 'coiled cauls'.
What is the effect? It creates a very slow, timeless, hypnotic but relentless pace – like the snails

Highlight words or phrases that make you think of strange things to 'touch': ooze; slimed; wrinkled; coiled. Why does this make you think of snails?

Extract 2

Ted Hughes was known for never being 'sentimental' about nature; he saw it as a powerful force and the creatures in it as powerful, sometimes 'God-like' beasts...

Cat and Mouse

On the sheep-cropped summit, under hot sun,
The mouse crouched, staring out the chance
It dared not take.

Time and a world
Too old to alter, the five mile prospect –
Woods, villages, farms – hummed its heat-heavy
Stupor of life.

Whether to two
Feet or four, how are prayers contracted!
Whether in God's eye or the eye of a cat.

Form: Does the poem have stanzas? The poem has shape: Underline the parts of the poem that reflect the movement of the cat.

Highlight any alliteration, sibilance or assonance. Can you explain what the effect is?

Highlight words or phrases that make you think of 'action'.

Underline the different types of punctuation. Explain what effect they have.

Task 4.

Discussion and writing task

Discuss the statement: 'Nature is not to be loved, but feared.' Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Use evidence from your own experiences as a starting point for your argument in a debate.



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