

Questions on Education for Leisure

1. Read through the poem. Do you think this is a poem about: death; menace; boredom; a superstar; education; weakness; a disturbed mind? You can choose more than one idea but you must give reasons for your choices.
2. What difference does it make that in the first line the speaker starts by saying they are going to kill 'something' but then changes it to say they will kill 'anything'?
3. Why is the word 'anything' in a sentence of its own?
4. Count up the number of times the speaker refers to 'I', 'me' or 'my'. What effect does this have? Does it say something about their sense of self-importance or their ego?
5. How has the speaker mixed the weather with their feelings? What does this tell us about how they usually feel?
6. The speaker says they squashed flies at school, as his/her does now. Why do you think they did it at school? What does it suggest about what or how much they learnt?
7. Another interpretation of the lines mentioned above is that the speaker is remembering a line from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, 'As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods / They kill us for their sport', which they studied at school. What might it imply that from a whole play (or more) the speaker remembers only this one line?
8. The line they remember says that like naughty boys the gods kill humans for pleasure or sport. In what way does this link with what the speaker has said in the first stanza?
9. The speaker is very confident of his/her abilities and says that they 'breathe out talent on the glass' but what is ironic about writing their name on glass with their breath? Does it last? What does this suggest about the speaker's supposed talent?
10. In what way does the second sentence of the third stanza show that the speaker is not the 'genius' they claim to be?
11. In the third stanza how does the speaker again narrow down, or temper, their initially wild claims?
12. What might be humorous about the idea that the cat, 'knows I am a genius'?
13. What is pathetic about flushing away the goldfish?
14. Why do you think Duffy chose the word 'bog' rather than 'toilet' for her speaker to say?
15. The sentence 'I see that it is good' is an echo of words in the creation story in Genesis where it states 'and saw that it was good' each time he created something. Why do you think the speaker says it?
16. In what way are the speaker's actions the antithesis of what god did?
17. Why do you think the speaker leaves it until the end of the fourth stanza to mention that they are unemployed?

18. How does the speaker even make 'signing on' seem as if it is part of their imagined celebrity status?
19. Why do you think the last stanza begins with the words, 'There is nothing left to kill' when they've only killed two things so far: a fly and a goldfish? Think about the way people refer to doing something to make a day / hours / minutes pass quickly.
20. In what way is it more sinister for the speaker to 'dial the radio' than ring a TV show? Consider the way someone on the radio is just a disembodied voice; we cannot know what they look like or where they are.
21. Do you think the man at the radio really 'cuts me off' or just stops the speaker talking? Do you think the speaker has really phoned the radio station or is it all in his/her head?
22. Suddenly, right at the end of the poem the speaker refers to 'our bread-knife'. What does this suggest to you: that they actually know the listener; that we can not take sole responsibility for their actions; they are not alone; they are not lonely; they imagine they share their life with someone?
23. 'The pavements glitter suddenly'; why? Do you think this is a literal statement or that there is something of interest at last? Do you think it's a play on the idea of streets being paved with gold (as in fairy tales)? In what way can the word 'glitter' be seen as menacing?
24. What do you think of the last sentence, 'I touch your arm'? Do you think the speaker is really talking to someone? Are they suggesting you could be you they attack? Is it to make the reader afraid at something they're usually laughed at? Is Duffy highlighting the cost of extreme boredom? Is she showing how suspicious we are in that the speaker just wants contact with another human being but now we fear them?
25. In what ways does the structure and layout of this poem add to the effect of it?
26. Do you find this poem: sinister; funny; sad; shocking; peculiar; confusing; immoral? Explain your ideas.
27. Do you think Duffy wants us to sympathise with the speaker? Give reasons for your ideas.
28. Which poems could you compare this one with and how?