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Date: _____

Poetry Unlocked
Chapter 3: Purpose/POV

Directions: Read the poem and then answer the eight following questions.

mouse = plentiful

"Death of a whale" by John Blight

When the mouse died, there was a sort of pity:
the tiny, delicate creature made for grief.

mouse = grief

whale = endangered

Yesterday, instead, the dead whale on the reef
drew an excited multitude* to the jetty.

How must a whale die to wring a tear?

Lugubrious* death of a whale: the big
feast for the gulls and sharks; the tug
of the tide simulating life still there,

until the air, polluted, swings this way
like a door ajar from a slaughterhouse

Pooh! pooh! spare us, give us the death of a mouse
by its tiny hole; not this in our lovely bay.

~~Sorry, we are, too, when a child dies,
but at the immolation* of a race, who cries?~~

many deaths

simile

Key Vocabulary

Multitude = a large number
Lugubrious = mournful
Immolation = sacrifice

Questions:

1. What do you think is poet's motive in writing the poem?

Purpose: People may be "comfortable" with death on a small scale, but are uncomfortable, hostile or even uninterested on a large scale or when it becomes unpleasant.

2. How is the reader meant to respond to the poem?

Agree that most people react this way
* Agree with author's point of view

3. How has the poet positioned you, the reader to respond to the poem? - several techniques:
Compares smell of whale to smell from slaughterhouse, to express disgust of death on a large scale; "immolation" to describe the death of a race

4. Are there other ways a reader might respond to it?

* Reader may disagree with the poet's point of view and believe that people do care about human tragedies on a large scale.

5. What values and attitudes are highlighted in the poem? Which of these are highlighted in a positive or negative way? Compassion (positive): ^{disheartened of} for the human race; Cruelty (negative): of people who do not relate to uncomfortable deaths.

6. What has the poet left out because it has assumed that the reader will have knowledge to understand the material in the poem? The poet does not provide an example of the death of a whole race. For example, the genocide in Rwanda. It is assumed we will know this.

7. What has the poet left out in order to present a particular view?

The poet does not explore the reasons why people may find it hard to relate to death in various circumstances.

8. What aspect of the subject matter, theme or characters has the poet emphasized in the poem?

Emphasize: people are moved by small scale and individual deaths. They are offended by unpleasant deaths and death on a large scale.