STUDY QUESTIONS: SEAMUS HEANEY

“Digging”

1.) What is the point of all the details about the poet’s father at work in stanzas two through five?

2.) What is the point of the details about the grandfather in stanza six.

3.) Explain stanza seven; where are we in time?

4.) Consider the opening and closing lines that relate to the poet. Who is he, what is his relationship, besides kinship, to the men he describes and the work they perform?

5.) Consider the poem in cultural, more specifically postcolonial terms, how is this indicative of a postcolonial situation?

“Requiem for the Croppies”

1.) In the first line the reader is introduced to an “our” and the pronoun “us” is invoked throughout. Who is this “us”?

2.) Explain the lines two to four.

3.) Explain the point of the four lines that follow the colon at the end of line six; what is the poem talking about here?

4.) What is going on in lines eleven and twelve?

5.) Explain the significance of the final line.

6.) What kind of poem is this; consider it in terms of postcolonial ideas we have discussed.

“Bog Oak”

1.) Explain the title; what is this?

2.) Look at the details of this “carter’s trophy” in the first two stanzas; what is the point of these details? Where are we?

3.) Who are these “mustached dead”; what is this section about?

4.) What is the meaning of the line about no ‘oak groves’?

5.) What does Edmund Spenser have to do with anything (go on the net or to a reference source and learn something about his biography)?
6.) Explain the poet’s position in the poem; where is he, what is his relation to his subject?

“Anahorish”

1.) Explain the first stanza and a half. What is the poet talking about here?

2.) Explain the next five lines after the italicized repetition of the title.

3.) What is he talking about in the last stanza?

4.) Relate this poem to the first; what is the point here?

“Viking Dublin”

1.) Examine the images in the first for stanzas. What are these, what do they suggest, how are they significant?

2.) What does the phrase “trial pieces,” announced in the title and repeated in section II, suggest?

3.) What is this phenomenon as it is revealed in section III, and what does one make of the image of the “long sword”?

4.) What is the point of section IV? What “enters [his] longhand,” and what does Hamlet have to do with anything?

5.) What is the point of section V with Vikings and “gombeen-men,” and “old fathers”?

6.) What is the point of skulls in Dublin in the last section?

“Act of Union”

1.) Who is the speaker in section I, and what is going on?

2.) What are we to make of some of this imagery: “gash breaking open the ferny bed,” “the heaving province,” “the tall kingdom over your shoulder,” etc.?

3.) What has happened by section II? What are the “little fists” the speaker refers to?

4.) Explain the title?

5.) Suggest a postcolonial reading.
“The Toome Road”

1.) Whose is the poetic voice; who is this “I”?

2.) What is he dealing with; what happens on the Toome Road?

3.) Interpret the last two lines.

“The Flight Path”

1.) Who is the speaker, the “I,” in this poem, and what is his initial feeling?

2.) Who is the “he,” and what is meant by the reference to film noir?

3.) After the ellipses (l. 26), what is going on? What is this border guard asking and how does the poetic voice respond?

4.) What is the point of the section on Dante and Ciaran Nugent?

5.) How does the poem end; what is going on with the answer the voice gives to the policeman’s inquiry?