John Montague
Leaving Certificate
Notes and Essay
### How to Tackle a Poetry Question

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<td><strong>S</strong></td>
<td>Subject (no more than 2 lines)</td>
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<td>Message (theme)</td>
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<td><strong>L</strong></td>
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<td><strong>E</strong></td>
<td>Effect (how did it make you feel)</td>
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### Personal Response to Montague: Possible Options

- Theme of hardship and suffering
- Interested in life’s victims
- Concern for other people’s suffering
- Discusses intimate personal experience
- A compassionate and non-judgemental observer
- Theme of separation and exile
- Deals with his family roots
John Montague ~ Early Life

Although he was born in New York City on the 28th of February 1929 he is regarded as an Irish poet. He was reared for a few years in Brooklyn where some of his poems regarding his childhood take place, most notably "The Cage" detailing his father's job in the subways of Brooklyn itself.

Language & Style

- Montague has an easy accessible style of writing.
- This allows people all across the world to relate to his poetry.
- His language is personal and anecdotal. He addresses the reader in conversational English.

Themes

- Nature
- Isolation & Separation
- Childhood

The Locket

Themes

- Dysfunction and its consequences
- Relationships
- Remembrance
- Understanding

Tone

- Anger
- Honest
- Understanding
- Hurt
- Pain
- Sympathetic
- Acceptance

The Locket-Title

- Ornamental casing suspended from a chain containing something of value, usually a picture of a loved one, a memento, for example a lock of hair
• Often used to contain pictures of a couple enclosed within a heart
• Enclosure could be important

Lock: ‘to secure, trap or fasten’

Structure

Seven stanzas
Seven sestets
42 line poem
7 sentences

Breakdown 1

• Use of ‘the lady’ implies distance if not discord
• The lady is his mother who has died
• Her passing is communicated somewhat casually
• Honest admission that his mother caused him ‘guilt and pain’
• His ‘first claim to fame’ was that his was ‘the worst birth in...Brooklyn’
• Hyperbole
• His was the worst birth perhaps in the eyes of his mother

The Welcoming Party

• This poem is one that Montague wrote when he was a teenager seeing the images of prisoners being released from prison camps at the end of World War II.
• The images flickered before his eyes for the first time in a newsreel and made a considerable impact on the young Montague.
• He was deeply shocked by the scenes that he witnessed and this is conveyed very effectively through his words.
• He evokes the reader’s emotions by confessing his own feelings of remorse and helplessness while he watched the skeleton-like figures of prisoners tasting

• John Montague senses the continuation of prehistoric Ireland among the people and in the landscape where he grew up. He seems to recapture a more distant Irish past by recalling his own immediate past - the scattered and frightening neighbours of his childhood. ‘Like dolmens round my childhood, the old people.’ He presents pagan Ireland as a raw, haunting and mythical presence. It consists of rural poverty, frustration, feuding, secrecy, spells, curses and denial. ‘The rune and the chant, evil eye and averted head, Fomorian fierceness of family and local feud.’ The characters are frightening and shadowy.
'Maggie Owens ... a well of gossip defiled, fanged chronicler of a whole countryside... The Nials... dead eyes serpent-flickered as one entered.'

The Hidden Side of Human Personalities

John Montague contemplates the vulnerable underside of people who may appear harsh on the surface. ‘Maggie Owens ... all I could find was her lonely need to deride.’ 'Mary Moore .... a by-word for fierceness, she fell asleep over love stories.' He reveals the real personality behind the public smiles of his father. 'My father ... extending his smile to all sides ... the least happy man I have known.' John Montague is able to forgive his mother for rejecting him because he sees her pain and senses the different personality she had before life turned harsh: 'my double blunder ... poverty ... yarning of your wild, young days ... the belle of your small town, landed up mournful and chill.'

Like Dolmens Round My Childhood

A series of powerful pen portraits vividly showcases some of the eccentric individuals and lonely figures scattered through the harsh rural terrain of County Tyrone where the poet grew up. As always, Montague writes about communities which belong to an older lifestyle with sensitivity and realism. The eerie poem shows how the resonance of other people's distant voices forge his identity.