

# Jugged Hare

- by Jean Earle -

## Background information

Teachers can decide, based on their knowledge of the group, at what stage (e.g. beginning/end) of the discussion this question is asked:

Have you ever/might you ever go to a film, concert, show, match etc. not because you thought you would enjoy the event but to impress a boyfriend/girlfriend? (You do not necessarily have to admit to it out loud, but it may help in understanding the poem.)

Website advice on hanging hares:

It is best to hang your hare for a while in your shed - depending on the weather and shed temperature, a couple of days should be quite sufficient if you do not like it too gamey.

Source:

<http://www.ruddingpark.co.uk/wild-cooks-blog/recipes/november-jugged-hare-wild-cook-style/>

## Activities

### A

As suggested in other teacher notes in this series, identifying the key people in a poem is a very useful first step.

### B

Learners can explore their own examples of situations where they behave in a way that is designed to please others rather than to please themselves. In the context of the poem it can lead on to issues of female and male roles in marriage at this time. (Jean Earle was born in 1909.)

### C

This type of question is valuable in providing many alternative routes to interpretation of character. Learners should be encouraged to choose the quotations they find most resonant themselves, rather than trying to come to a class consensus. Identifying conflicts and tensions, such as between 'lady-hands' and 'flense a hare', can provide a powerful route to exploring ambiguities.

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## D

The image of 'playing house' is perhaps worth exploring in some detail as it helps to demonstrate that the woman described preparing the hare, which takes up much of the poem, does not seem to be representative of the woman herself - or a depiction that seems to match the woman's self-image.

## E

On balance, do you think he is presented in a positive, negative or neutral way?  
What are the implications of his allowing his wife to do something she hates?  
What are the implications of 'Stunned with tribute'?

Learners may need to be discouraged from making simplistic evaluations of character in a poem which encourages the reader/listener to explore some of the complexities of the relationship.

## F

This question is designed to draw attention to a structural feature which may influence the reader/listener's interpretation. Just as with short sentences 'creating an impact', it is vital that learners explore the *effect* of the single line stanza *in the specific context of this poem*.

## G

Learners can discuss how far, and at what points, the 'I' of the poem represents the girl at the time of the incident and how far, and at what points, it represents the voice of the adult poet.

## H

Learners can debate such issues as whether this is the only stanza that is fully consistent with the wife playing 'house', or whether this is the only stanza solely bound up with the wife role-playing. Such issues can be put up for debate and discussion, leading to explicit comparison and contrast with other stanzas.

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## Further activities

### I

Another question that could be asked early on as learners discuss the poem is why is 'long-ears' hyphenated? This is simply to clarify for some readers/hearers that the poet is not referring to ears but to a hare!

Teachers may wish to link to other examples where the compound word changes the meaning: black board; loud speaker; sweet heart. In this case the poet has created a compound word using a hyphen. Learners can discuss how far this choice of word(s) for the hare matches the wife's feelings about the hare in some way.

Learners could also consider why she 'smoothed' the fur of the hair before removing its guts? What does the irony of the action suggest about her conflicted feelings? Is the poet indicating the wife's underlying feelings towards the dead animal and what she is about to do?

### J

Repetition of words can be significant. Learners could consider why the poet has chosen to use the word 'lady' twice. The dictionary definition of 'lady' is a woman who is regarded as having good manners and elegant or refined behaviour. Who would usually prepare a meal for a lady? The choice of the word 'lady' can imply this is closer to her self-image than a woman gutting an animal.

### K

Jean Earle was born in 1909. How does this affect your reading of the poem? Do you need to think about the context to understand a poem - what would be the typical attitudes at the time it is set (rather than when written or now)?

Learners can be encouraged to evaluate the poem in the context of the time it was written, rather than imposing today's values on the text. However, it is well worth discussing how far attitudes have changed since the poem was written, so long as the emphasis keeps coming back to the actual text of this poem.