

## MAKING MEANINGS

### Mirror

#### First Thoughts

1. What thoughts or feelings did "Mirror" evoke in you? Did you find the poem surprising? Explain. (Review your Quickwrite.)



#### Shaping Interpretations

2. Identify the **speaker** of the poem. In what ways does Plath **personify** the speaker?
3. Describe the qualities that the speaker claims to possess. What does the speaker imply by saying "the eye of a little god" (line 5)?
4. The last line of "Mirror" contains the striking **image** of "a terrible fish." How would you explain the significance of this image in the poem? What associations and emotional overtones does the image have for you?

### Mushrooms

#### First Thoughts

1. What do you think this poem is really about?

#### Shaping Interpretations

2. Who is speaking in the poem?
3. What natural process do the speakers describe? What figures of speech help you to picture parts of that process?
4. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" is a well known expression from the New Testament of the Bible. What **ironic** twist is given to this scripture at the end of the poem?
5. What **tone** do you hear in the poem? What specific words help create that tone?
6. Both "Mirror" and "Mushrooms" deal with realities that lurk beneath the surface of appearances. What would you say those realities are?

#### Extending the Text

7. What kind of people are like the mushrooms? Is the story told in the poem a sinister one or a comical one—or is it something else? Compare your interpretation with those of your classmates. How have life experiences affected your interpretations?

## CHOICES: Building Your Portfolio

### Writer's Notebook

#### 1. Collecting Ideas for an Evaluation



When you evaluate a work of literature, you must decide how much background information you'll need to supply—either on the writer or on the text. Draft the opening paragraph of an evaluation of Plath's "Mirror" or "Mushrooms," in which you present some biographical background information about the poet. (Your essay should be targeted at readers with no familiarity with Plath.) Save your draft for possible use in the Writer's Workshop on page 1181.

#### Contrasting Texts

#### 2. Visions or Nightmares?

In a brief essay, compare and contrast Plath's attitude toward nature in "Mushrooms" with the attitude expressed toward nature in another text. Try Emerson's *Nature* (page 219), Thoreau's *Walden* (page 233), Dickinson's "Apparently with no surprise" (page 385), Frost's "Design" (page 560), or Bishop's "The Fish" (page 1035). Does each text see nature and the universe as benign or malevolent or indifferent? What does the text say about the relationship between human nature and the natural world? What is the tone of each text? What do you think of "Mushrooms" and the other text you've chosen?

#### Creative Writing

#### 3. Nature Speaks

Imitate Plath's device in "Mushrooms" of having something in nature speak and describe its growing process. Before you start to write, decide what tone you will give your speaker or speakers. Will your speaker use prose or poetry? Be sure to refer to your Quickwrite notes.

