

The Magicians of Edinburgh

Before Listening, Watching, Reading Teachers Notes and Key



Edinburgh

Note: These activities do NOT have right or wrong answers as they are all based on speculation by the student. The purpose is to acclimatise the student with the mood of the poem. Ask the students to imagine the answers **in relation to a city that they know**. Students will be expected to justify their answers based on their own experiences and thoughts. Given below are **some suggestions** for **possible** answers.

Think of a town or city that you know. How much has it changed in 1 year, 10 years and 40 years?
Encourage sts to do a little research about the recent history of a place they know - asking parents, residents or their teacher!

The writer expresses surprise that the City of Edinburgh 'managed to hit the 21st century - running' with the question 'How come?' Why is the writer surprised?
Check that the expression 'hit something running' is understood to mean 'at full speed' or 'without hesitation'. The writer didn't expect this to happen. Perhaps he thought that pre-21st century Edinburgh was old fashioned or behind the times.

Why would 1970s Edinburgh have shocked 'the sorcerer'?
Ask who they think 'the sorcerer' is. It could be anyone: an observer, an agent of change, the poet even. 1970s Edinburgh must have looked disagreeable. Students can speculate on what this might look like.

Why are banks, insurance and pensions companies the only entities to retain sorcerers these days?
Is it because they are magic? Or is it to do with the supposed cost of keeping a sorcerer. Perhaps sorcerers are seen as negative and this negativity is currently associated with banks etc.

What little moments of magic happen every day on the streets?
The key here is the word 'little'. Perhaps what is being referred to are little acts of kindness and thoughtfulness.

Between which two buildings would you be standing if you 'were perfectly positioned between God's Law and Man's'
'God's Law' would appear to indicate a place of worship (A church in Scotland is called a 'kirk'). Man's Law could refer to a courthouse, or government building or, within this context, a bank.

'we are the magicians' refers to whom a) the sorcerers b) the city residents c) the bankers
the key word is 'we' - unless the reader thinks that the poem is written by a sorcerer or a banker, the answer is likely to be the city residents.

After Listening, Watching, Reading

Look at your answers in 'Before Listening' again. Do you want to change any now that you have heard the poem?

Students can now refine their answers - but this doesn't mean to say that anything they wrote before is wrong. Just different! Suggestions as to interpretations of the poem are those given in 'Before Listening'

What significance do the following have in the poem? Explain.

'Pavement tables reclaiming the streets' - cafes & restaurants now have outdoor facilities

'when I stand at the top of the Mound, perfectly positioned / between God's Law and Man's' - geographically placed in the centre of the city, at the centre of power

I never leave home, but I meet someone I know- little moments of magic

wheelie bins - a new facility that has appeared in the 21st century- rubbish collection



Contrast 1970s Edinburgh with what you will find now.

1970s Edinburgh was a city of poor aspect with boarded up window and graffiti, dirty residential buildings (tenements) and windowless pubs. Horses would pull carts with milk deliveries. Now many buildings are modern, covered in glass and reflecting light. There is also 24 hour a day shopping, clubbing and take away food, seemingly endless festivals and improved public services

What is the significance of the final lines of the poem?

While making a claim for ownership of the city by the citizens of it, it hints at rejection of the corporate influence; being part of the city is not something you own.

How do we know that the poet is a resident of the city?

The use of the word 'we'.

Explain

'How come there's shopping 24/7'

- 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

'The Hogmanay Party'

- Hogmanay is the Scottish celebration of New Year. The Hogmanay Party is a large city-wide event which attracts many tourists every 31st December

'a wave of the corporate wand'

- private money is poured into (the project)

'Sir Sean Himself'

- reference to Sir Sean Connery, a native of Edinburgh. ('Himself' is often used in Scottish/Irish English to reinforce the subject of the sentence)

'I see our city shaped by the sky / and the sky by our city'

- the poet is referring to the line/silhouette created between roof scapes and the sky

'we are the magicians and we make the city'

- the magic of Edinburgh is in the hands of the citizens and it is they who create its atmosphere (not the corporate businesses)

Glossary

cobbled together	<i>put together in an unordered fashion (also makes reference to cobbles, which are the stones which made up old, mediaeval streets)</i>
kirkyards	<i>kirk is a church in Scotland, thus churchyard or cemetery</i>
howffs, closes, courts, vennels, wynds	<i>various references to enclosed spaces, narrow streets or public steps</i>
markets	<i>originally markets for hay: animal food; grass: horses; flesh: meat</i>
hit sthg running	<i>arrive or start something at full speed; without waiting</i>
rudely interrupted parliament	<i>Scottish parliament was stopped by English Act of Union in 1707</i>
shopping 24/7	<i>24 hours a day, 7 days a week</i>
pubbing, clubbing	<i>going out to pubs and clubs (all night?)</i>
all-night kebabs	<i>reference to fast food outlets available all night</i>
wall-to-wall	<i>endless. (comes from wall-to-wall carpets in a room)</i>
wheelie bins	<i>large rubbish bins for domestic refuse collection, on wheels</i>
Hogmanay	<i>New Year. Edinburgh hosts the world's biggest.</i>
sorcerer	<i>magician (may be good or bad)</i>
a 35	<i>number of bus from the airport into the city</i>
Day-Saver Ticket	<i>cheap bus ticket</i>
Sir Sean Himself	<i>Sir Sean Connery, a citizen of Edinburgh</i>
milk crates	<i>the reference is to a milk cart delivering milk to people's homes, the crates, made of metal, contained up to 24 pints of milk</i>
tenements	<i>tall, residential buildings containing flats. Typically late 19th and early 20th century construction</i>
Newington	<i>area of Edinburgh just south of the city centre</i>
Forth	<i>the wide river on which Edinburgh is situated</i>

Some Notes on the Scottish/Edinburgh accent

Scottish English is a rhotic accent, meaning /r/ is pronounced in the syllable coda. (Ref: *personal* (3' 26'')). As with Received Pronunciation, /r/ may be an alveolar approximant [ɹ], although it is also common that a speaker will use an alveolar tap [ɾ]. Less common is use of the alveolar trill [r] (hereafter, <r> will be used to denote any rhotic consonant).

While other dialects have merged /ɛ/, /ɪ/, /ʌ/ before /r/, Scottish English makes a distinction between the vowels in words such as *herd*, *bird*, and *curd* (ref: *-markets* (17''-20''), *first* (21''))

Many varieties contrast /o/ and /ɔ/ before /r/ so that *hoarse* and *horse* are pronounced differently (*horses* (1'20'')), /or/ and /ur/ are contrasted so that *shore* and *sure* are pronounced differently, as are *pour* and *poor*.

/r/ before /l/ is strong (*world* (2'57'')). An epenthetic vowel may occur between /r/ and /l/ so that *girl* and *world* are two-syllable words for some speakers. The same may occur between /r/ and /m/, between /r/ and /n/, and between /l/ and /m/.

There is a distinction between /w/ and /hw/ in word pairs such as *witch* and *which*. The phoneme /x/ is common in names and in SSE's many Gaelic and Scots borrowings, so much so that it is often taught to incomers, particularly for "ch" in loch.

The Edinburgh form of Scottish English, as heard in the video, is associated with the well educated or the suburban middle classes in Scotland. In terms of vocabulary and grammar it is virtually identical to Standard English in England, although individual speakers speak Standard Scottish English with their own particular accent. Popular terms, such as 'Edinburgh Morningside accent' are frequently used to describe the type of accent associated with speakers such as heard here.

THE MAGICIANS OF EDINBURGH

Ron Butlin

Our Late Medieval cobbled-together city of kirkyards, cathedrals,
howffs, castles, closes, courts, vennels and wynds,
hay markets, grass markets, flesh markets
managed to hit the twenty-first century
- running!

How come?

How come our rudely interrupted parliament talks twice as much sense
(or talks twice as fast)? To make up for lost time?
How come trams and pavement tables are reclaiming our streets?
How come there's shopping 24/7, pubbing, clubbing and all-night kebabs?
Wall-to-wall festivals? Bus lanes and wheelie bins? The Hogmanay Party?

Did a sorcerer step out of a book of old Scottish folk tales,
take a 35 in from the airport, flash his Day-Saver Ticket,
to end up in the Southside at no extra cost?
Did Seventies' Edinburgh shock him so much?
The boarded up windows, the litter, graffiti,
the horses hauling themselves and their carts out on their rounds,
their breath clouding the cold morning air, and Sir Sean Himself
riding high on the milk crates?
Did one wave of a corporate wand turn soot-blackened tenements
and windowless pubs into these glass-
and-mirror palaces? (Banks, insurance, law and pensions
– for who else retains sorcerers these days?)

For magic happens daily on the Bridges, on George Street,
in Tollcross – a nod from a stranger,
a quick drink with a friend I've bumped into.
(I never leave home, but I meet someone I know).
From my Newington flat the Forth's a Mediterranean blue,
there are faraway hills I can sometimes almost touch . . .
Most of all, when I stand at the top of the Mound, perfectly positioned
between God's Law and Man's (the Kirk to my left,
the Bank to my right) I see our city shaped by the sky
and the sky by our city – and heaven itself seems possible then,
if only for a moment, and if only I would let it.

Tenement City. Corporate City. Capital City. Festival City.
World Heritage City, UNESCO City of Literature.

We don't need street maps or SatNav to find where our friends live
Together, we are the magicians and we make the city.

All Edinburgh is ours - and it's *personal!*