In Mrs Tilscher's Class

The poem examines the change that takes place between childhood and adolescence. The safety of Mrs Tilscher's primary school classroom is contrasted with life outside against a background including the Moors Murderers Ian Brady and Myra Hindley. A growing sexual awareness marks the end of innocence.

The poem presents a primary school classroom full of interest and happiness. The first two stanzas are full of the excitement felt by children as they learn and discover new facts. They are full of references to the senses of sight, touch, sound and smell as you, the reader are lead on a journey of discovery.

The overwhelming feeling is one of safety as you see the world through the eyes of the children. The syntax reflects the language of childhood, 'This was better than home. Enthralling books. The classroom glowed like a sweetshop.' The excitement is also captured by the language, 'The laugh of a bell swung by a running child.' with personification bringing items to life.

However, even in the midst of all this happiness, the threat of adult knowledge pervades. Although 'faded', the faces of Brady and Hindley thrust themselves. The child is able to remove them from his world, 'like the faint, uneasy smudge of a mistake.' but the poem shows that this level of innocence is not able to continue.

The change from childhood to adolescence starts in the third stanza with the growth of the tadpoles, 'from commas into exclamation marks'. At first, the frogs are presented in as an object of fun and enjoyment as they are followed 'by a line of kids'. However, the 'rough boy' marks the end of the child's innocence by telling her where she came from. The child rejects this news, 'You kicked him', but it has still altered how they regard their parents. The disjointed syntax of the final sentence reflects the shock felt by the child.

The final stanza is full of images of passion and sexual frustration. The end of childhood is tied in with the end of term (and a move to secondary school?). The innocence of primary school remains but now seems to be harder, 'then turned away. Reports were handed out.' The child runs out into an unknown future as an adolescent.

The use of second person 'You' throughout the poem should not be ignored. This is an experience which we all share and the poem forces us to assume the role of the child and experience the change from innocence to knowledge.