‘In Mrs Tilscher’s Class’ - Carol Ann Duffy

A) Before reading the poem

1. With a partner write a list containing everything that you can remember about your primary school. Include: what you learnt; what the classrooms looked like; what your favourite teacher was like; the atmosphere in the classroom.
2. Now join with another pair and compare your lists.
3. As a group of four create your own school poem. You may use any style of poetry that you wish.

B) Now read the poem once

1. From memory what do you think that the poem is about? What is the tone of the poem?
2. Underline any words that you do not understand and look up their meanings in a dictionary. Write the meanings, in pencil, next to the poem.

C) Detailed study of the poem

1. How is the reader drawn into the atmosphere and setting of the poem in the first two stanzas?
   To answer this question you will need to consider:
   • The manner in which your senses of smell, sight and hearing are engaged
   • The classroom objects described
   • The use of similes, metaphors and personification.
2. What is the atmosphere / tone of the first two stanzas?
3. What is the effect of the introduction of Brady and Hindley in the second stanza? How is this effect cancelled?
4. The third stanza changes the direction of the poem from a description of the classroom and lessons. What does this stanza focus upon?
5. What is the child learning in the third stanza?
6. How would you describe the tone of this stanza?
7. The final stanza moves on to the final term of the school year. What has changed about the child in this stanza? How do you know?
8. How is the child’s impatience and frustration described in the final stanza?
9. What do you think are the poet’s feelings towards Mrs Tilscher as she looks back? Explain your answer with reference to the poem.
10. In what ways can this poem be compared with ‘My Grandmother’, ‘Piano’ and ‘At Castle Boterel’?