Stealing

"While living by Wimbledon Common, her neighbours built a traditional snowman for their children, which was stolen. Carol Ann Duffy stated that it could only have happened under Thatcher's premiership, a period during which individualism and greed were regarded as virtues. It is clear that she regarded the actions of the individual as a barometer of the political climate." (York Notes Advanced 2001)

The persona of the thief comes shining through the language and the slang. He seems proud of his acts and seems to be boasting of his feats. He sees what he wants and takes it. The comparison between the brains of the snowman and the thief reminds us of the 'cold hearted' phrase.

Negative images are present in the second stanza, 'a fierce chill pierced my gut'. His cold hearted attitude is shown by the reactions of the children and his lack of sympathy. Does he steal because he has been left behind by the materialistic society and is trying, in his own way, to join in.

The futility of the man's life is evident, 'I joy-ride cars/to nowhere', he breaks into houses purely to have a look (at their riches?). He is portrayed as being on the outside of society, restricted to looking at others' riches.

He works hard to rebuild the snowman, 'I wanted him, a mate' is this his unspoken reason? Does this serve to highlight his isolation by society? His violence when the snowman does not look right suggests a lot of pent up aggression. His isolation is further emphasised by the final line.

Throughout the poem, the thief tries to explore the society in which he exists. He sees a society in which the only way he can keep up, is to steal. He is marginalised by society and his anger at this leads to his actions.

Internal Rhyme, 'slice of ice', 'chill...thrill' shows the internal workings of the thief's brain. It is calculated and demonstrates that he is trying to explore why he acts in the way that he does.

Things to Do:
1. Make a list of: a) items stolen, b) his/her anti-social feelings, c) your impressions of the thief.
2. After reading the first two stanzas, explain why the thief steals the snowman. Do the same after reading the third.
3. After reading the fourth stanza, explain what happened to the snowman. Why?
4. What does the last line say about the thief?
5. What words / phrases can you find that show the poem is conversational?
6. The sounds of words are important. The phrase, 'the slice of ice' may be said with a hiss which emphasises the lack of emotions. Alliteration can emphasise key words: a) comment on the use of words beginning with 'm' in the first stanza, b) What is the effect of the similarity between 'mute' and 'mate'.