

The Pizzenous Pet Shop

By Gregor Steele

The Scots Language Award: Support materials for levels three and four – A simple Scots text

The Pizzenous Pet Shop

The Clarty Cat fae the Western Isles,
Luves tae dive aroon in cundies,
Twice a day fae Mon tae Sat,
But no at aw on Sundays.

The Boakin Budgie flees again!
This time it's had nae seed,
It's stuffed itsel wi fruit an cream,
Tae blaw chunks on yir heid.

The Slevverin Slug is sleekit,
It plans oot its attack,
It slides up yir shirt tae the collar,
An dribbles doon yir back.

The Floater Frog's a minger,
Fowk gie it dug's abuse,
It sneaks up an sooks yir ginger,
An leaves bits in the juice.

The Honkin Hurcheon's hummin,
Its reek ye cannae thole,
It bides beside the cludgie,
An helps clean oot the bowl.

By Gregor Steele
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Questions for discussion, and possible written answers:

1. The poem is split into five stanzas, each featuring a different creature from the “Pizzenous Pet Shop”.
2. What do you notice about each of the animals’ titles, and how they are introduced?
3. Why do you think Steele chose the title he did for the poem?
4. Comment on each of the creatures and their disgusting habits. Which is worst, in your opinion?
5. In what way is the Clarty Cat’s behaviour different from the Boakin Budgie, the Slevverin Slug and the Floater Frog?
6. Is the Clarty Cat similar in any way to the Honkin Hurcheon?
7. Why do you think Steele chose to have the Boakin Budgie eat “fruit an cream”? What difference would it make if it ate traditional bird seed?
8. How does the Slevverin Slug’s plan make you feel as you read?
9. Which word reinforces the idea that the Slug has indeed planned “oot its attack”?
10. What does the Floater Frog’s behaviour have in common with the Slevverin Slug?
11. Which word helps you understand what “ginger” is?
12. Explain why the Hurcheon might be “Honkin” and “hummin”. Which other word reinforces the meaning of these two descriptions?
13. Who do you think Steele wrote this text for?
14. Poems are usually written to entertain. Can you think of any other purpose Steele might have had in mind when he wrote about these creatures?
15. Briefly, say what this poem is about.

Written/oral tasks:

Write another verse for this poem, in Scots, featuring another Pizzenous Pet.

You should:

- use the same rhyme scheme and structure as Steele
- give your animal a suitable alliterative name
- have your purpose and audience in mind – write these down before you begin

You could:

- choose something which disgusts you in life and create an animal which creates this problem

OR

Create an advert, in Scots, for one of these creatures, or for the Pizzenous Pet Shop in general.

You should:

- include details from the poem
- be truthful as well as remembering that your purpose is to sell animals
- think about the kind of person who might want to buy such creatures

You could:

- make a poster, design a magazine or newspaper advert, script or record a radio advert, script or film a TV advert
- look at examples of the kind of advert you want to create for ideas and conventions before you begin

OR

Work with a partner to have a conversation, or on your own to script the conversation, between the owner of the pet shop and a dissatisfied customer.

You should:

- work in Scots
- choose one (or more) of the animals which the customer has bought
- think about what kind of problems the creature may have caused for its new owner
- think about how the shopkeeper is likely to respond: the customer is always right, but all sales may be final

OR

Imagine you are a new employee at the Pizzenous Pet Shop. Write or talk, in Scots, about your first day.

You should:

- remember that you will have encountered these animals for the first time
- include details from the poem

You could:

- write a diary entry or a Facebook post or a story or a letter to your mum
- role play a conversation when you get home from work or a phone conversation with your best friend

Historical and cultural factors:

Historical and cultural factors which have helped to shape Scots include the following. These factors can be seen to a degree in the words of the poem, as illustrated underneath each one.

Historical

From the 7th century AD, Anglo-Saxons speaking a northern variety of Old English settle in parts of south-east Scotland; this is the earliest form of the language that developed into Scots.

1. The word “aroon” in stanza 1 is very like the English word meaning the same: “around”. Can you find other words which are similar to their English equivalents?

Viking settlement took place in northern Scotland and the Northern Isles; Norn, a variety of Old Norse, was spoken in the Northern Isles until 18th century.

2. Steele uses the word “thole” in the final stanza. This word comes from the Old Scots word *thoill* – to suffer - and originally from the Old Norse word *þola* – to endure. NB: That funny letter at the beginning of the Norse word looks like a p, but it is not. It is a thorn, and was pronounced “th”. Here is an explanation of the thorn, from <http://mentalfloss.com/article/31904/12-letters-didnt-make-alphabet> : “Have you ever seen a place that calls itself “ye olde whatever”? As it happens, that’s not a “y”, or, at least, it wasn’t supposed to be. Thorn, which was pronounced exactly like the “th” in its name, is actually still around today in Icelandic. We replaced it with “th” over time— thorn fell out of use because Gothic-style scripting made the letters y and thorn look practically identical. And, since French printing presses didn’t have thorn anyway, it just became common to replace it with a y. Hence naming things like, ‘Ye Olde Magazine of Interesting Facts’”.
3. The word “sooks” is used in the fourth stanza. It sounds very like modern Scandinavian words for ‘sucks’: suga in Swedish; suge in Norwegian and Danish. It is also like the Dutch word *zuigen* and the German word *saugen*. Can you find out how these words sound? Why might there be similarities here?

The Auld Alliance between France and Scotland increased French influence on Scots.

4. The word “pizzenous” in the title comes from the Old French word *puison*. Old Scots used *pusoune*, and Middle English *puison*.
5. The word “cundies” in stanza 1 is the Scots form of English *conduit* from Old French *conduit*, meaning conduct. How are these words linked in meaning?

Cultural

From the mid-16th century, written Scots has been increasingly influenced by developing Standard English forms.

1. Steele uses the word “Sunday” at the end of stanza one. DSL lists the following spellings for this word: Son(e)day, Sunda(y), Sono(u)nday, among others. Why do you think Steele chose this spelling? What difference would it make if he had chosen one of the other spellings?

Scots is often used for entertainment and comedy, e.g. football commentaries, popular press, pantomime, comic strips.

2. The phrase “blaw chunks” in stanza 2 is a slang expression. Can you find others in the poem? (check with the DSL – if a word is not listed at all, it is likely to be slang)

Scots dictionaries were published, including Jamieson's Dictionary in 1808 and the *Scottish National Dictionary* from the 1930s onwards, but there is no standardised Scots spelling.

3. The word "pizzenous" from the title is Steele's chosen spelling: DSL has various spellings, including: pushion, pooshion, poosion, pushen, puzhion, puzzen, paazyen, pisin, pizion. Why has he chosen to spell the word this way?
4. The word "slevverin" in the third stanza is another word which Steele has used his own spelling for. DSL has slaver, slaiver, slaever, slever, sliver, but not this spelling. How does this spelling affect the way we say the word?

The dictionaries do mean that writers can find and use words from other regional varieties of Scots.

5. The word "cundies" in stanza 1 is mainly used in Dundee. Steele is from the West of Scotland. Why do you think he chose to use this word rather than "sheuch" or "sheugh" which are more normally used in his area?

As well as the similarities to other languages outlined above, the following Scots words can be compared:

6. The word "boakin" in stanza 2 is similar to the Dutch word *bulken*, to roar. Why might this be?

There are some interesting linguistic features of Scots which can be seen in the poem:

Present participles are formed by adding *-in*. In verbs that end in *-le*, the ending is *-lin*. [NB there is no need for an apostrophe at the end of the word.]:

1. In stanza five, the Hurcheon is described as “hummin”. This is the present participle of the verb *to hum* – to smell. Notice the ‘m’ is doubled before the ‘in’ is added. What difference would it make to the sound of the word if there was a single ‘m’? Can you find other examples of this feature of Scots in other texts?

Negatives are formed by adding *-nae* or *-na* to auxiliary verbs:

2. Also in the final stanza, Steele uses “cannae”. The auxiliary verb “can” has been made negative by adding “nae”. Can you think of other examples of verbs which take “nae” at the end to make them negative? Can you find examples in other texts?

There are words in the poem which illustrate the way Scots has developed as a language in more recent times:

1. In the fourth stanza, we are told “The Floater Frog’s a minger”. The word “minger” is a noun, which comes from the verb *to ming*. DSL defines the word: *ming v.* To be smelly or noisome, to be malodorous, to stink. DSL thinks this possibly came by extension from *ming*, a noun meaning ‘human excrement’. But this originally came from Old English ‘to mix’, which was used about mixing tar for smearing on sheep and for the resultant mixture of smelly, disgusting tar.

So, “minger” is a noun, which comes from a verb which was based on a different noun, which came from a verb and a noun. The next time you use the word *mingin*, consider whether you are comparing the object of your disgust to human waste or smelly sheep treatment, or both.

It is interesting too that the word *minging*, with a ‘g’, seems to have entered common English usage. Have you heard it being used on TV?

2. Later in that stanza, the word “ginger” is used. This is used in certain parts of Scotland to mean a fizzy soft drink (of any flavour). Other parts use “ale” or “juice” instead. DSL only added this meaning for *ginger* in 2005. The Herald reported in 1999: “Head brewer Robin Graham said: ‘In Glasgow, before the war, all the shops used to brew their own ginger beer. That’s why you still get wee boys going in for a bottle of lemonade and asking for a bottle of ginger.’” Are there other words which have been added to Scots in the relatively recent past?
3. Here is another: The word “cludgie” is used in the final stanza. DSL added it in a supplement in 1976: *n.* A slang term for a water-closet. They believe it is a deformation of *closet*, possibly conflated (joined with) with *lodge*.

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