

**Ruth Miller**  
**Penguin on the Beach**  
**More questions of a challenging nature!**

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Ruth Miller was born in 1919 at Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape. She was apparently deserted by her father, whereupon she and her mother moved onto a farm with an aunt, probably in what was then the Northern Transvaal -- now the Northern Province of South Africa.

She was educated at a convent school before moving to Johannesburg where she would spend most of her adult life. There she became involved in school education, first as a secretary and later as a teacher of English.

Her poetry has been described as invoking a "note of tragedy", probably influenced by the untimely death of her teenage son in 1962. She herself would die of cancer in 1969, just seven years later. She was just 50 years of age.

The poem "Penguin on the Beach" was written during the late 1960s, and portrays the impact on a penguin of being caught in an oil-slick with its dreadful threat of extinction of whole colonies of sea-life.

1. "But close within his head's small knoll, and dark  
He retains the image: Oil on sea,  
Green slicks, black lassos of sludge  
Sleeving the breakers in a strain-spread scarf."
  - What is a "knoll"? (2)
  - Why does the poet add the parenthesis "and dark" to the description of the knoll? (4)
  - Comment on the imagery contained in the words "Oil on sea, green slicks, black lassos of sludge sleeving the breakers in a strain-spread scarf." (10)
  
2. "He shudders now from the clean flinching wave,  
Turns and plods back up the yellow sand,  
Ineffably wary, triumphantly sad."
  - Why should the wave be a "flinching wave"? (4)
  - Why should the penguin be said to be "ineffably wary" and "triumphantly sad"? (4)
  
3. "He eats  
Fish from his Saviour's hands, and it tastes black."
  - Explain the distinctly religious image in these words. (4)
  - Comment on the expression "it tastes black". (4)

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