"The Stoat"
by John McGahern
(1978)

Background:
John McGahern- (1934- 2006)
Irish writer of novels, plays, and short stories
Mother died of cancer when the author was 10 years old.
Had a distant relationship with his father as the father was physically abusive to the children
Author was the oldest of 7 children
Won scholarships to school and college, became a teacher and writer
Father was a police officer, mother was a school teacher

Vocabulary:
Stoat: type of weasel that lives in Europe. Called an ermine in winter when its coat changes to white from brown. Related to the ferret.
Tussock: a small area of grass that is thicker and longer than the grass around it.
Ruefulness: expressing sorrow or regret in a slightly humorous way
Aura: air, atmosphere
Solemnity: seriously, formally, in a dignified manner
Foreboding: feeling that something bad will happen, apprehension
Widower: a man whose wife has died and he has not remarried
Farce: an absurd event, a mockery, travesty, absurdity

Reading Questions:
1. Describe the protagonist’s relationship with his father. This story is autobiographical (based on real events in the author’s life). What does this tell us about the author?
2. What purpose does the uncle serve in the story? The uncle is not autobiographical, so why would McGahern invent him? Explain.
3. What is the father seeking? Why?
4. How does he go about getting what he seeks? Does it work?
5. Why does he change his mind?
6. What is an allegory?
7. Explain the allegorical elements in this story.