

Ore Choir: The Lava on Iceland

Age Group: High school, undergraduate

Materials: *Ore Choir*, selected poems

Time: 45-60 minutes

Medium: In-person or virtual

Lesson Overview: After reading *Ore Choir*, students will discuss the themes and format of the collection.

Before Lecture: Students should read *Ore Choir*. The lesson and other materials below focus on *Irish monks*, the dialogues, *The easel leaner*, and *The Ore*

Lecture topics: The major theme of *Ore Choir* is our reaction to nature and how our ability to understand and manipulate the natural world changes the stories we tell about it.

- For example, in the poem *Irish monks*, the monks seem to engage with the landscape by naming and honoring it: “They called the earth by/new names:/*Saint’s Mirror/Holy Eden...*”. The monks see the ground as a God-given refuge and are not curious about the geological activity around them.
- By contrast, *The Scientist* is a dialogue of question after question, a result of viewing the basalt mainly as a source of knowledge, and the ground responds by giving vague clues about time and measurement.
- A third perspective is put forth by *The easel leaner*, as the artist tries to piece together and "unblur" the lava beds without demanding or reverencing nature. How do the different forms of poetry and imagery show these shifting perspectives?

Discussion:

1. While most of these poems are from a human perspective, the ground is often shown as a character. What is Didden trying to show us by removing the human element?
2. The lava bed is shown as animalistic and sometimes as art, unpredictable, and composed. What does this contradiction say about humans and nature?
3. What do the changing forms of poetry (dialogues, extra spaces on the page) add to the tone?

Writing prompts:

1. These poems were written by finding the words in another text, and Didden says that she used this method to reflect how lava affects the landscape. Using a different natural phenomenon and a text on that topic, write a poem using this method.
2. Write three different dialogues above using your chosen phenomenon. Think about how the goals and emotions of the speakers reflect the style.
3. Seeming contradictions are common in these poems. For example, in *The Ore*, where the lava (most likely carrying iron), “...ran out to put an end to war.” Write a piece using this kind of contrast.

Final/Creative Portfolio Assignment:

Summary: The focus of these materials has been how our perspectives change the way we interact with the world, and how the nature of a thing changes how we interact with it. The exercises above have focused on getting the students to hear and understand this conversation between human and nature. This project is a cumulation of that process.

Assignment: The student should write a poem or a series of them from the perspective of the natural phenomenon they chose earlier in the exercises. They should consider how to reflect the nature of this phenomenon in the tone, imagery, form, etc. and how to reinterpret the meanings the humans gave this phenomenon in the past (research isn't entirely necessary but recommended). This should be accompanied by a short explanation (3-4 paragraphs) of the student's methods and what they wanted to convey about their chosen topic.

Suggested Timeline: 2-3 weeks

Materials: Word processor, pencil and paper, a copy of *Ore Choir*, and up to three works for research (must be approved)

Requirements: Poems and explanation should be typed.
Explanation should be in MLA formatting.
Explanation should be on a separate page.

Critical Paper Assignment

Summary: The poems in *Ore Choir* vary between fantastical and realistic tones, either purely metaphorical or presenting the landscape from a scientific viewpoint (eg. *Irish monks* and *The Priest questions the Lava*), and the materials above can help us understand how facts and myths (or art) can and do coexist. This assignment can be assigned early on or be swapped as a final assignment with the creative assignment above.

Assignment: Write a 5-7 page paper examining and comparing two poems from *Ore Choir* with a particular emphasis on this contrast. The two poems can be assigned or chosen by the student with the professor's approval. The paper should consider and compare the following traits:

- Imagery, tone, voice, character development, and figurative language
- How are they used? Which seem more mystical? More scientific?
- Why are they important? What is different about the two poems and what perspectives do they seem to show?

Suggested Timeline: 2-3 weeks

Requirements: Students should show a clear understanding of both poems and all papers should include:

- a thesis statement and coherent structure
- a clear and thoughtful exploration of each poem exploring all the traits above
- supporting evidence
- MLA format, with Times New Roman, 12pt font, double-spaced, citations, a works cited page, and page numbers
- proofread and without obvious errors