

A cluster of poems with *Nature* as common denominator

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Hard Frost - Cecil Day-Lewis (British)

An African Thunderstorm - David Rubadiri (Malawian)

Vultures – Chinua Achebe (Ghanaian)

Pertinent questions:

How does nature affect your life?

When/how are you aware of nature and its effects?

What is nature like in England? Africa?

Activities:

1. Learners create a poster/collage with the different settings of the 3 poems. At least one image of each setting should be incorporated in the visual presentation.
2. Discuss and compare the positive and negative elements of the 3 poems.
3. Discuss how do the three poets each use nature to support the meaning/message of his poem?

Hard Frost



With specific diction and through imagery a beautiful scene of unexpected hard frost is described.

What is frost? Not snow.

Frost is a deposit of small white ice crystals formed on the ground or other surfaces when the temperature falls below freezing. It is a coating or deposit of *ice* that may form in humid air in cold conditions, usually a "light frost" occurs in temperatures of -2 to 0 °C. A *hard freeze* is a period of at least four consecutive hours of air at these

low temperatures. Many plants can survive a brief frost, but very few can survive a hard freeze.

Message:

After a cold and harsh winter, there is also the promise of seeds to germinate and grow and a promise of the new season. Applied to the human condition, this means that in spite of death and illnesses or harsh times in our lives, time evolves and old sorrows are replaced by new joys.



An African Thunderstorm

An imminent storm is described as exciting and a bit frightening because of its strength. Mothers and children hurry to get out of the way; the clouds and the winds are ominous.

Message:

The African community can brace itself in a storm. The storm can also refer to colonialism or corrupt leaders that affect the lives of an African community.



Vultures

The first half of the poem deals with a vivid description of a day in the lives of the **vultures** and how, after they have eaten from the bloated corpse, they would sit together and nestle close.

The second section describes a commandant of the Belsen Nazi extermination camp with graphic references to his work – a day in his life. The smell of dead corpses and gas clings to him when he leaves the camp but he leads a "normal" life at home and buys chocolate for his child at the end of the day.

The end: we should rejoice about the fact that there could be tenderness and love even in evil places/people. Or we should despair because of the inherent evil in us even in loving circumstances.

Message/Meaning:

In both sections vivid descriptions of gory everyday living circumstances are presented (of the vultures and the commandant). But in both of these settings a glimmer of kindness/love is also noticed. We should be glad of that kindness in a

world torn apart by war or should we despair about the fact that evil lurks everywhere, even in “good” hearts?

But: the vultures are doing what they are supposed to do: clean the environment of dead flesh. The commandant is worse than the birds because he “cleans” by killing the Jews.

Structure:

Enjambment is prominent in the 3 poems. Run-on lines can increase the pace, obscure rhyme and support/hide rhythm.

Other aspects:

Hard Frost	An African Thunderstorm	Vultures
Very British/European setting	Many references to the African setting.	The vultures place the 1 st section in the country and the 2 nd setting is an extermination camp in Europe in WW2.
2 stanzas to support different content	Loosely grouped lines form 3 stanzas	Free verse: sentence 1 stretches to line 16 and only 6 sentences in the 51 lines.
No rhyme scheme	Often only 2 words per line	No clear stanzas but indentations introduce new settings/idea.
Descriptive vocabulary	No rhyme scheme	“Story” unfolds in long sentences
Imagery of frost and nature and often complex	Rhythm in short description of the elements	Descriptive words present graphic images
Structure supports the meaning of the poem: first the description of the frost scenery and then the promise of the real spring to come	The structure with the short lines add to the excitement of the storm.	The short lines obscure rhythm and forces the reader to focus on the words, the graphic descriptions and disturbing settings.

Diction:

		
<p>Frost is seen in a new light, not as a killer: <i>brilliant, white diamonds, bridal gear</i> – scene is beautiful though unexpected and short-lived.</p>	<p>Plain vocabulary.</p>	<p>Erudite vocabulary: ogre, harbingers, perpetuity, charnel-house, gorged. Graphic descriptions: <i>broken bones, swollen corpse, full gorged, charnel-house, human roast, glow-worm tenderness.</i></p>
<p>Beautiful scene is described, though unexpected and short-lived.</p>	<p>Onomatopoeia: rumble, crack, whirling.</p>	<p>Different tenses: past tense in describing the vultures but present (continuous) tense for the commandant – more immediate</p>
<p><i>Image of spring, mockery spring, for a few hours</i> - refer to the scene as unreal and not lasting. But: real transformation is underground where the seeds will grow.</p>	<p>The use of the gerund (often as adjective) renders immediacy to the events: hurrying, gathering, whirling, dangling, blinding. Plain vocabulary.</p>	<p>Graphic descriptions: broken bones, swollen corpse, full gorged, charnel-house, human roast, glow-worm tenderness.</p>
<p>Many examples of images/comparisons of the hard frost and how the frost changes the landscape.</p>	<p>The diction effectively creates the setting of the imminent storm and sets the tone of the poem.</p>	<p>The diction supports the settings of evil and also conveys the serious message of the poem.</p>

Some examples of Imagery:

		
<p>Personification: The frost, the sun, fake spring.</p>	<p>Simile: Clouds are like locusts and a madman; also a ship and a bird of prey. Clothes are like flags</p>	<p>Alliteration: The grayness of the dawn is stress by the repeating of the “d”: <i>drizzle of a despondent dawn.</i></p>
<p>Simile: the mist is without</p>	<p>Sound and movement are</p>	<p>Metaphor:</p>

a clear shape (amorphous) like it could have been during creation.	prominent in the last stanza: <i>screams, wind whistles and whirls, wave, rumble, crack.</i>	<i>the broken bone of a dead tree</i> – also connects with death in the concentration camp later. <i>bashed-in head, pebble on a stem</i> - describes the flat-headed vulture with its naked neck.
Metaphor: <i>white lilac on the window panes, maydrift loading the hedge, the elms are crystal blossomers.</i>	Visual, aural, tactile and even olfaction senses (with “smell of fired smoke”) are incorporated.	Graphic descriptions: <i>cold telescopic eyes, corner in a charnel-house, fumes of human roast, tiny glow-worm of tenderness.</i>

Tone:

The diction supports the tone:		
Admiring: <i>brilliant, crystal, diamonds, blaze, flounce, future breathe.</i>	Expectant, exciting: <i>hurrying, whirling, tossing, madman chasing, dart, whistles.</i>	Abhorring, derogatory: <i>broken bone, swollen corpse, full gorged, fumes of human roast, etc.</i>
The imagery supports the tone:		
Change in tone to disapproving: with the image of comparing the frost blanket to a wedding dress: the country maid will be transformed because of the “dress” but she will have to return it and resume her usual, dull appearance. After the beauty of the frost has disappeared, some plants will even show damage.	Resilience: in the images of the trees allowing the wind to pass – the community adapts to colonialism and dictatorship and experience it/them as a storm which will pass.	Caustic: in the images of love in a charnel house and the integration of the commandant’s work and family life. Acerbic: <i>in icy caverns of a cruel heart the perpetuity of evil.</i>
Finally, a tone of optimism in the final lines: the earth is surrendering its frozen hold to allow for the new spring and the promise of life and growth.		

Finally:

How does the imagery and diction add to/support the message of the poem?		
<p>A pastoral scene is described and the diction and imagery fit perfectly and lead to the message that spring/new life stage is awaiting. The frost is given mystical and magical powers, but even though the imagery suggests flowers and brilliance and glittering scenes and spring, these appearances are deceiving because they will not last. The real spring awaits its time.</p>	<p>The thunderstorm in many shapes and personae dominates the scene but the community is able to brace itself against the storm/colonialism/dictators. The structure and diction add to the immediacy of the storm. Clever images of the West suggest that the poet is not merely referring to a thunderstorm but also to other threats.</p>	<p>The horrific scenes and “actors” within them show that evil is ever-present on earth. But we should praise providence for the glimmer of tenderness even in an evil heart, OR despair that we shelter everlasting evil even if we love. The graphic images and diction succeed in preparing us for the “evil” settings.</p>