

# WILL.H.OGILVIE POETRY

## THEME: NATURE

### RELEVANT CURRICULAR AREAS:

*Literacy, Language, Science, Geography, Natural History, Art, HWB*

Nature is one of Ogilvie's main themes and this resource only gives a taste of his work about the natural world. If the theme is on weather, landscapes, flowers, trees, water etc etc there will be Ogilvie poetry to refer to. I would recommend starting your search in 'The Border Poems' ('At Sunset', 'Scottish Rivers', 'The Folding of the Purple') and 'Balladist of Borders and Bush' ('Snowdrops', 'Snowflakes', 'Goodbye Summer' and 'Burns in Flood').

Much of this work has been recorded and can be found either on our own website <https://www.whogilvie.co.uk/> and <https://www.wellroadproductions.org.uk/>

### STARTER ACTIVITIES

- What wild animals, birds, and plants can be found around where we live?
- Where would you go to find:
  - Heather
  - Deer
  - Gorse
  - Curlew
  - Buzzard
- What equipment would you need to go on a nature trail?
- Give an example of alliteration and a simile using an animal you would likely find in Scotland.

## POETRY EXTRACTS

### NUMBER 1.

I see the rivers, low before the rains,  
Laden with the laughter of the moorlands where they roam,  
The little Border rivers flashing white like silver chains  
Made to bind warm hearts to Home.

*(From 'Home', Border Poems by W H Ogilvie)*

*Notes: Here the poet describes a river as its source in the high, wet moorlands. The poet often describes the sound of water as 'laughter' - making a happy, joyful sound - and here this is further emphasised with alliteration. The simile highlights how all the small burns join together to create the main river. The use of 'Home' here links humanities relationship with the countryside that surrounds them.*

### Exploring the poem: Questions

1. With reference to the poem, describe the river as its source?
2. Explain the simile by answering these question:
  - a) describe a 'silver chain' and its purpose
  - b) using your description in a), how is a river similar to a 'silver chain'?
  - c) what makes a river and a silver chain 'flash'?
3. At the source, a river is a tiny stream. Explain what happens and where it finally ends up.

## NUMBER 2.

'Tis the playground of the swallow,  
'Tis the heron's banquet-hall  
Just a gleam the wild ducks follow  
When the evening shadows fall.

*(From 'The March Burn', Border Poems by W H Ogilvie)*

*Notes: This poem follows on nicely from the previous extract as it discusses the birds that live around a river. There is an element of giving wildlife human qualities which highlights their freedom and gives the piece a romantic feel.*

### Exploring the poem: Questions

1. Think about a group of children playing in a playground. Write a list of their movements. Now write a sentence about the movement of the swallows as they fly over the river.
2. A banquet is a very large dinner. Now consider, why the heron spends so much time sitting on the riverbank.
3. What other wildlife live on, and around the river? Use alliteration to describe their actions. For example, 'salmon sweeping upstream'; 'dancing ducks'

**NUMBER 3.**

**But our sturdy Scottish rivers, they come tumbling from the Bens  
Like a crowd of happy children to make music in the glens;  
The mountain mist surrounds them and the moorland heather flanks  
And the bending of the birches is a beauty on their banks**

*(From 'Scottish Rivers', Border Poems by W H Ogilvie)*

*Notes: The poet paints an archetypal image of Scottish scenery. There are lots of poetic techniques in this small extract: simile, alliteration and descriptive word choice making this a perfect piece to introduce these basic techniques.*

**Exploring the poem: Questions**

1. The poet suggests that the river is 'laughing'. What sounds does a river make to suggest this?
2. A river goes on a journey starting as a tiny stream to an estuary at the sea. Which part of the journey is described in this poem
3. Which line of the poem do you like best? Explain why and what it makes you think of.

## NUMBER 4:

The clouds are scattered; the sun rides through  
All earth with his splendour gilding;  
The loch is lit with a lighter blue  
And a swan in the reeds is building.

(*'On Cheviot's Shoulders'*, Hill Road To Roberton by W H Ogilvie)

*Notes: A rather romantic image of nature but of which we are very aware and children would possibly recognise. The poet suggests gentle movement of the wind as the clouds are 'scattered'. It also suggests the power of the sun- it changes the colour of the water- in the springtime, highlighted as the swan is nest building. It reminds us that this planet would not be so full of life without the energy of the sun. Finally, the poet using the alliteration of 's' throughout these lines. It highlights the power of the sun and makes the whole section soft and peaceful.*

### Exploring the poem: Questions

1. The clouds are 'scattered' - what does this tell us about the weather?
2. The sun makes a difference to the scenery. Describe what difference it makes.
3. The poem is set in a specific season. Which season do you think it is? Give a quote to support your answer.

## NUMBER 5:

Just a sweep of march-moorland and heather,  
Just a brae where the blackfaces climb,  
Just a loch where the grey gulls forgather  
And the burns our of Cheviot chime!  
Just a glen where the wild-duck and pheasant  
Find sheltering nook from the blast

(From 'The Land We Love', Border Poems by W.H.Ogilvie)

*Notes: An image of a wildness up in the lowland hills. The plants and sheep mentioned are hardy and cope well in harsh conditions. The wildlife appears to struggle to survive in the surroundings through word choice of 'climb', 'forgather' and 'sheltering'. It lacks humanities input and one imagines that this scene has remained unchanged for centuries. The bleakness of the scenery is highlighted through the word choice of 'sweep', 'grey' and 'blast'.*

### Exploring the poem: Questions

1. Quote the words in this poem which suggest that this is a difficult place for wildlife to survive?
2. This poem uses Scottish words to describe the scenery. Find the meaning of:
  - a) brae
  - b) burn
  - c) glen
3. The word 'blast' highlights the bleakness of the scene. What could create a 'blast' in such a place?

**NUMBER 6:**

**But the hills hold the voices  
That are most dear to me;  
The lone whaup crying  
Over heath-bush and scree;  
The red grouse scolding,  
With his harsh "Go back!"  
The blackfaced, bleating  
On the high sheep track.**

**The breeze of the lowlands  
Blows softly, as in fear,  
But the wind shouts boldly  
On the high tops here,  
Whistling in the ridges,  
And roaring through the glen**

**(‘The Voices in the Hills’ by W.H.Ogilvie from ‘Balladist of  
Borders & Bush by George TA Ogilvie)**

*Notes: this poem focuses upon the sounds of nature. The sounds are wild and slightly frightening: ‘harsh’, ‘shouts boldly’ and ‘roaring’ like the wind. However, at the start of the poem the poet clearly states that he does not think negatively of the noises at all. This highlights the importance that we recognise, and develop, a relationship with the natural world. Notice to the contrast on the lower ground highlighted by the softer alliterative ‘b’. The wildlife appears to be protecting the landscape from the poet - regarding him as an invader.*

### Exploring the poem: Questions

1. This poem focuses upon the sounds of nature.
  - a) Copy the words which describe a sound in the first stanza.
  - b) What do these words tell us about the landscape?
  
2. What do the birds and animals seem to be 'saying' to the poet as he walks across the hills?
  
3. The wind is very 'vocal' in the hills.
  - a) copy the words used to describe the wind.
  - b) what does this tell us about the weather in this scene?

## ACTIVITIES BASED ON POETRY

- Look on a map and follow the route of one of the Border Rivers. What tributaries does it have? How many miles does it travel? Where does it end up? Now write a creative piece about its journey and what it passes on the way.
- Discuss the difference between the river at its source and as it reaches the sea. Now imagine the river is a human - going from a child to an adult. How does it change on the journey?
- Research the wildlife commonly found along a Scottish riverbank.
- Each pupil can research a specific fish/bird/animal. They could use this information to give a talk or make a display poster
- Pupils could also use their research to write creatively about the creature and its life.
- Create a wall montage of a Scottish River and include quotes which inspire pupils to appreciate its beauty.
- Compare the different wildlife found in the hills and the valley's e.g. variety of sheep, birds or animals. Find reasons for these differences by exploring the landscape and weather.
- Ogilvie paints an image of nature being unaffected by man. Of course, this is not always the case and his work could fit in well with an environmental project -e.g. polluted waterways, impact of windfarms in wild areas etc.

## PLENARY ACTIVITIES

- Use alliteration to describe a plant, tree or animal.
- In two sentences describe something from nature by using descriptive language. Ask your partner to guess what it is you describe.

*Have you used this resource and come up with another idea?  
If so, comment on the website and we can add it to this resource.*