

WILL.H.OGILVIE POETRY

THEME: BORDER REIVERS

RELEVANT CURRICULAR AREAS:

Literacy, Language, History, Art, Geography, HWB

Ogilvie makes continuous links between the Borders landscape and its reiving history in his work - making it a very useful resource when studying this period of history.

Other literature, relevant to Primary and secondary S1-3, which may be of interest is: 'Raiders and Reivers' by John Sadler (published by Ergo Press) and 'There's Blood in the War Saddle' by John Barton Watson. I have uses material from these books whilst teaching Ogilvie's poetry to help contextualise it a little more.

At the end of March there is also the Border Reivers Festival in Hawick in which the local primary schools play an important part.

Much of the poet's 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

- Use the pictures on the Borer Reivers powerpoint to stimulate discussion about this period of history.
- Many inhabitants of the Borders have clear links to the Border Reivers if their surname is Scott, Armstrong, Elliot, Kerr, Johnstone, Hume, Maxwell. Discuss the differences between life then and now. Then discuss what would be the similar (the landscape, weather).

POETRY EXTRACTS

NUMBER 1.

**Armstrongs and Elliots! You know where they were bred-
Above the dancing mountain burns, among the misty scaurs
And through their veins, these Border lads, the raiding blood runs red
The blood that's out before the dawn and home behind the stars!
Armstrongs and Elliots!!
And touch your glass with mine!**

(From 'A Border Toast', Hill Road to Robertson by W H Ogilvie)

Notes: These two reiving families hailing from Liddesdale. The area has little changed in the preceding years- it is still largely uninhabited and the roads follow the winding rivers and burns. Sometimes they went out on raiding expeditions together - if they were getting along fine at the time! Johnnie Armstrong of Gilknockie is one of the most notable reivers. Liddesdale was known as the 'bloodiest valley in Britain'.

The poem reads more like a song and one can imagine a fellow standing up and singing this whilst celebrating a successful raid. Word choice highlights the nightly escapades and ensuing battles as well as the pride and passion that those from the area felt.

Exploring the poem: Questions

1. The word 'blood' is repeated. Give a reason as to why this is appropriate when discussing the Border Reivers.
2. What does the poem suggest about the place in which they lived? Quote words to back up your own suggestions
3. What does the 'voice' in this poem think about the Elliots and Armstrongs?

NUMBER 2.

THE RAIDERS

Last night a wind from Lammermoor came roaring up the glen
With the tramp of trooping horses and the laugh of reckless men
And struck a mailed hand on the gate and cried in rebel glee:
"Come forth. Come forth, my Borderer, and ride the March with me!"

I said, "Oh! Wind of Lammermoor, the night's too dark to ride,
And all the men that fill the glen are ghosts of men that died!
The floods are down in Bowmont Burn, the moss is fetlock-deep;
Go back, wild Wind of Lammermoor, to Lauderdale -and sleep!"

Out spoke the Wind of Lammermoor, "We know the road right well,
The road that runs by Kale and Jed across the Carter Fell.
There is no man of all the men in this grey troop of mine,
But blind might ride the Borderside from Teviothead to Tyne!

The horses fretted on their bits and pawed the flints to fire,
The riders swung them to the South full-faced to their desire;
"Come said the Wind from Lammermoor," and spoke full scornfully,
"Have ye no pride to mount and ride your fathers' road with me?"

A roan horse to the gate they led, foam-flecked and travelled far,
A snorting roan that tossed his head and flashed his forehead star;
Then came the sound of clashing steel and hoof-tramp up the glen.
And two by two we cantered through, a troop of ghostly men!

I know not if the farms we fired are burned to ashes yet!
I know not if the stirks grew tired before the stars were set!
I only know that late last night when Northern winds blew free,
A troop of men rode up the glen and brought a horse for me!

('The Raiders', Border Poems by W H Ogilvie)

Notes: This poem relates a dream of someone joining with their ancestors on a raid. One of Ogilvie's most famous poems which links local names to historical events. Lammermoor are the range of hills between the Borders and Edinburgh and the Carter Fell is the border between Scotland and Northumbria. Being a very skilled horseman, Ogilvie uses his knowledge and specific vocabulary to describe the journey through the animals the men ride. There are many poetic techniques including the rhythm reflecting the horses gallop; alliteration, assonance, repetition, onomatopoeia and rhyme.

Exploring the poem: Questions

Stanza 1: Who came to 'visit' the speaker in the poem?

In your own words, explain what they wanted him to do?

Stanza 2: What excuses did he give for not going out with them? Explain in your own words, as much as possible.

Stanza 3: They are going on a journey - where are they going?

What do you think they intend to do?

Stanza 4: What were the horses keen to do? Quote words to show this.

Stanza 5: 'There came the sound of clashing steel' What does this suggest is happening at this point in the story?

Stanza 6: What did the Reivers do to the English farms?

NUMBER 3:

Ho! for the blades of Harden!
Ho! for the driven kye!
The broken gate and the lances' hate
and a banner red on the sky!
The rough road runs by the Carter;
The white foam creams on the rein;
Ho! For the Blades of Harden!
"There will be moonlight again!"

(From 'Ho! For the Blades of Harden', Border Poems by W H Ogilvie)

Notes: Any of the four stanzas of this poem are perfect for study.

Harden is situated on the A7 (Hawick to Langholm), on the outskirts of Hawick and was (and still is!) home to the Scotts. The house sits above a deep ravine, perfect for hiding stolen cattle. (<http://www.clanscottscotland.com/harden-house/4593284445>). The story about Wat Scott of Harden is the focus of a musical 'A Reivers Moon' and the CD is available to download.

The poem describes a reiving raid with the emphasis of horses, battles and the spoils!

Exploring the poem: Questions

1. The men are described by what they are carrying- 'blades'. What does this tell us about these men?
2. Quote the line which describes the horses. What does it tell us about the journey?
3. The Reivers rode at night when they couldn't be spotted. What two lines in this extract show this?

NUMBER 4:

The four square walls of Hermitage stand steep and stout today
As when with their sheltering strength the wounded Bothwell lay;
The lone whaups cry as mournfully, the river runs as brown
As when, the willing slave of love, a Queen came riding down.

To Hermitage! To Hermitage! - the river laughed in glee,
The beeches tossed their crimson flags; and glad at heart was she!
(‘Hermitage’, The Border Poems by W H Ogilvie)

Notes: Back to Liddesdale and Hermitage castle. Here the poet highlights that the castle and landscape has changed little over the years. It refers to the rather romantic story of Mary Queen of Scots, risking her own life in this ‘wild country’ to visit the sick Bothwell. The Whaup (curlew) highlights the isolation of the place and the personification of the river and trees unite the landscape with the castle.

Exploring the poem: Questions

1. Read the extract carefully to suggest why the ‘whaups cry mournfully’?
2. Why would it have been dangerous for Mary Queen of Scots to visit the Borders at this time?
3. The poet gives nature human qualities. Explain what the river and trees are doing and why.

ACTIVITIES BASED ON POETRY

- These poems fit in perfectly with any historical study on the Border Reivers - being quoted on displays or a focus for creative writing.
- Do some research on Border Reiver names - their links with the past and the present.
- Pupils could pretend that they have just returned victorious from a raid and write their own celebratory song to be sung at a Banquet.
- There are many stories about famous Reivers such as Johnnie Armstrong and Wat of Harden. Share some of these stories, alongside the poetry, with pupils to allow them to produce artwork or creative writing.

PLENARY ACTIVITIES

- Continue this sentence: *If I was able to go in a time machine, I would go to the time of the Border Reivers because...*
- In two sentences describe what you have learnt about the Reivers horses.

*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.*