



National Poetry Day in Scotland

Thursday 3 October 2013

'Water' Poem

'Coire Fhionn Lochan' by Thomas A. Clark



Teaching
Resources:
Primary
Schools

'Coire Fhionn
Lochan'
by Thomas
A. Clark

The Poet and His Work

Thomas A. Clark (1944–)

Thomas A Clark was born in Greenock. His poetry has been consistently attentive to form and to the experience of walking in the landscape, returning again and again to the lonely terrain of the Highlands and Islands.

In 1973, with the artist Laurie Clark, he started Moschatel Press. At first a vehicle for small publications by Ian Hamilton Finlay, Cid Corman, Jonathan Williams, Simon Cutts and others, it soon developed into a means of formal investigation within his own poetry, treating the book as imaginative space, the page as a framing device or as quiet around an image or a phrase, the turning of pages as revelation or delay.

From 1986, Laurie and Thomas A Clark have run Cairn Gallery, one of the earliest 'artist-run spaces', specialising in Land Art, Minimalism and a lyrical or poetic Conceptualism. After many years in the Cotswolds, the Clarks moved in 2002 to re-open the gallery in Pittenweem.

In addition to his books and smaller publications, Clark has also made site-specific installations in galleries, in gardens or in the landscape, and has many works in permanent collections world-wide.

The Poem

'Coire Fhionn Lochan' was published in a booklet by Clark's Moschatel Press in 1990. It was also included in his collection *Tormentil and Bleached Bones* (1993), as well as in the anthologies *The Order of Things: Scottish sound, pattern and concrete poems* (2001), and *The Thing that Mattered Most: Scottish poems for children* (2006).

'Coire Fhionn Lochan' – the title is Gaelic – means 'little lake of the white whirlpool'.

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In *The Thing that Mattered Most*, Clark wrote: "my poems are often written on walks in the highlands and islands. They may be about spending time quietly in a wood or, like [this] poem, watching the movement of the waves on a little loch on the island of Arran. Like the waves on a loch, each line of the poem is only slightly different from all the others."

Reading The Poem – Notes And Questions

Read the poem aloud.
Try reading it in groups, with readers taking turns to read individual lines, or stanzas.

Why does a poem written in English have a Gaelic title?

Which line or lines in the poem suggest

- movement
- stillness
- sound
- silence
- singing
- neatness
- messiness

Discussion

Where in Scotland do people speak Gaelic today?

In the past, Gaelic was spoken over a much wider area, and place-names still reflect that.

Can you think of some places in Scotland which have Gaelic place-names?

For example, think of

- hills or mountains whose names include Ben (or Beinn), Knock (or Cnoc), or Meall
- valleys whose names include Glen or Strath
- places whose names begin with Dun- or Kil-

Find out what these names mean in English.

This website is a good place to start:

www.domesdaymaps.com/Scottish+Place+Names+Index.htm

Research >

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'Water' Research



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1. On the Map

Find Coire Fhionn Lochan on an Ordnance Survey map – the grid reference is NR 900 459. You can use the OS Landranger Map Sheet 69, or the OS Explorer Map Sheet 361. You can also look at these maps online, at www.getamap.ordnancesurveyleisure.co.uk – but you need to register with the website first.

How high above sea level is Coire Fhionn Lochan?

2. Google Earth

Find Coire Fhionn Lochan on Google Earth.

Describe the area around the lochan. Can you see any of the following?

- houses
- trees
- hills
- burns
- paths
- rocks

Is this somewhere you would like to visit? Why?

Using the OS map, name

- the hills you can see near the loch
- the stretch of water to the west of the loch
- the area of green land beyond the stretch of water

3. Supply and Treatment

We pipe water from lochs and reservoirs into our homes and schools, but the water has to be treated first to make sure it is safe for us to drink.

Look at the Scottish Water education resource on Water Treatment at www.scottishwater.co.uk

Coire Fhionn Lochan is on the Isle of Arran. Thinking both about where there is a lot of rain, and where there are a lot of people, is this a good place to have a reservoir? Why?

How you would treat the water from Coire Fhionn Lochan if it was going to be piped into people's houses? Find out about the water treatment process listed in Activity 3:

- Raw water
- Screening
- Clarification
- Filtration
- Disinfection
- pH adjustment

Creative Activity >

3.

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Creative Activity

Write your own poem about lochs, using repetition.



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1. Names

Write a poem naming different lochs in Scotland.

Look at a map of Scotland, or the area where you live. Find the names of say twelve lochs, and write these down. Decide which order the lochs are going to come in. You could list them

- in alphabetical order
- from smallest to largest, or largest to smallest
- from nearest to farthest, or farthest to nearest
- from the shortest name to the longest, or the longest name to the shortest.

Now write a phrase which will be repeated in the poem, and which goes with the names of the lochs. Here are some suggestions, or you can make up your own:

- the little waves of Loch...
- the shoreline of Loch...
- the fishes of Loch...
- the birds of Loch...
- the moon's reflection in Loch...

Think too about how many stanzas your poem is going to have. If you have twelve lochs, so 12 lines, you could have

- two stanzas of 6 lines each
- three stanzas of 4 lines each
- four stanzas of 3 lines each
- six stanzas of 2 lines each.

As an alternative to lochs, if there are a lot of burns and rivers near you, you could write a poem naming these instead.

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2. Adjectives

Choose a loch near your school – or a burn or a river.

Write down, say, twelve adjectives to describe it. This is easiest if you can go and visit it! Think about

- sound and silence
- colours
- light and dark
- movement and stillness
- enjoyment and danger

As in the exercise above, decide which order your adjectives should come in.

Find a good way to use the adjectives plus the name of the loch (or river, or burn) in a phrase which you can repeat. These examples use 'beautiful' as the adjective, and 'Loch Maree' as the loch:

- beautiful Loch Maree
- Loch Maree is beautiful
- isn't Loch Maree beautiful?
- the beautiful shores of Loch Maree

Further Reading and Links

Books

Clark, Thomas A.: *Tormentil and Bleached Bones*
(Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993)

Cockburn, Ken (ed.): *The Order of Things: Scottish sound, pattern and concrete poems* (Edinburgh: pocketbooks, 2001)

Johnstone, Julie (ed.): *The Thing that Mattered Most: Scottish poems for children* (Edinburgh: Scottish Poetry Library, 2006)

Websites

www.spl.org.uk/poetry/poets/thomas-clark

Biography, Poems (including 'Coire Fhionn Lochan'),
In the Library, Links

<http://thomasaclarkblog.blogspot.co.uk>

NPD poem posters, teaching resources & films:

www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk

Explore Scottish Water's education materials:

www.scottishwater.co.uk

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