



Lesson: Analyzing & Interpreting the Text

OVERVIEW

Composer Stephen Paulus calls *Through All Things* a “thinking” poem with text worthy of the maturing singers in middle school. Using a constructivist approach, students will engage in activities for examining, responding, and interpreting the text on their own. The work can be done over multiple days.

LEARNING GOAL

Through their inquiry and exploration of the text excerpt from “Tintern Abbey” by William Wordsworth students will define the words and develop personal interpretations and images for the text.

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- Teacher resource: [Background Information for Conductors and Teachers](#)
- Dictionaries, classroom computers (optional – for internet dictionaries)
- Pencils, markers/colored pencils
- Copies of the worksheet [Investigating High Power Words](#) for each group
- Chart paper
- (Optional) [Lyrics of Through All Things](#) reading

PROCESS

Step 1: A word study of key words from “Tintern Abbey.”

This poem is filled with “high power” words, rich text used by 19th century poets. Investigating key words for their meaning before deconstructing the poem will help singers’ performance of the music. This activity can be done quickly in small groups of 5/6 students, or with the whole ensemble.

1. Make a word bank of words from the poem that you would like students to investigate on a poster or the board. For example:

presence, disturbs, elevated, sublime, interfused, dwelling, impels

Do not reveal their origins, but tell students that they are a few of the words they will sing in a new piece.

2. Read each word in the list to the full ensemble, speaking with an expressive voice. Students echo each word.

3. Tell students that as smart students, they can figure many things out on their own. So they are going to conduct their own word investigation.
 - Give each group one word; if the ensemble is large, more than one group can work with the same word.
 - Each group will select a person who will serve as their facilitator/spokesperson, a time keeper, dictionary/computer person, and scribe.
4. Groups will discuss and unpack each word in four ways:
 - Defining the word (from prior knowledge, with a dictionary, with the computer)
 - Brainstorming a synonym and an antonym (These should be familiar terms, but be prepared to remind students that a synonym is a word or phrase that means nearly or exactly the same thing; an antonym is a word or phrase that means the opposite.)
 - Drawing a picture interpretation of the word
 - Using the word in a sentence
 - And as a bonus, one or more members of the group can interpret the words by making a frozen statue, a tableau

The ideas will be documented by the scribe on the worksheet. Drawing and writing can be delegated to various group members.

5. Reconvene and ask each group to share their work.
6. Post the completed worksheets near the word bank.

Step 2: View and translate Wordsworth's text

1. Display the full text for the song *Through All Things* and read the poetry out loud as students follow the text. Your expressive reading will also provide some clues as to the meaning of the words and phrases.

*And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts;*

*a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,*

*Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;*

*A motion and a spirit
That impels
All thinking things,
all objects of all thoughts,
And rolls through all things*

2. Provide some context for the poetry by using resources included with this curriculum as well as the notes below. Look for information about Wordsworth and “Tintern Abbey” to help students understand that the poet was reflecting on the banks of the River Wye about the natural world, the power of that world, and his own life.
3. (Students should use their worksheet from the word bank in this step of the process.) Read through each of the four sections, one at a time, and facilitate a discussion of each.
 - What do the words mean? What can they figure out from knowing some of the complex vocabulary?
 - Restate a phrase in their own words.
 - What images do they see?

Jot down their ideas as they flow in the discussion.

4. Read the poetry together, encouraging students to read with expression and in a deliberate manner.
5. Congratulate them on their work. If they have an interpretation and understanding that is rich and full, this is all you need to move forward. But if you think it would be useful, and would not diminish their hard work, read the interpretation from the Schmoop website.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR CONDUCTORS AND TEACHERS

In addition to these notes, look at the student reading on “The Lyrics of *Through All Things*” as well as the “Tintern Abbey” Background for Teachers” found in the Teacher’s Guide. William Wordsworth is a significant English language poet and “Tintern Abbey” is one of his landmark poems. For this reason, there are many websites with rich and interesting facts about and interpretations of the poem and the poet. One of the best is a site for students in AP English class,

You can view analysis and Interpretation of these lines from the Shmoop, a website for students of any age that promotes learning (<http://www.shmoop.com/tintern-abbey/stanza-4-lines-58-99-summary.html>). A prompt for the 5th stanza will appear at the bottom of the page.

Lines 93-99

And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

And the round ocean and the living air,

And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;

- When he hears the "still, sad music of humanity," the speaker says that he feels some kind of "presence" – of what, we're not sure. Nature with a capital "N"? God? Some indefinable force of good? See the “Themes” section for more on this.
- The "presence" (whatever it is) "disturbs" the speaker, but in a good way. The "presence" makes the speaker lift his "thoughts" to higher things.
- The "presence" also gives the speaker a sense that there's "something" like a divine presence that exists "deeply interfused," or blended in with everything around it.
- This "something" lives in "the light of setting suns" (97), in "the round ocean and the living air" (98), in "the blue sky" (99), and even "in the mind of man" (99).
- This "something" sounds an awful lot like the "Force" in *Star Wars*. It exists in everything in nature, surrounding us, filling us, and binding the universe together. Only we're not sure that Wordsworth's "something" has a dark side.

Lines 100-102

A motion and a spirit, that impels

All thinking things, all objects of all thought,

And rolls through all things.

- The speaker defines the "something" with a little more detail. It's "a motion and a spirit," that "impels," or animates, all things that think, and that "rolls through all things" (102).
- He repeats the word "all" four times in two lines. He really wants to emphasize that this "spirit" connects everything.
- The more we read, the more we're convinced that George Lucas read "Tintern Abbey" before writing *Star Wars*.

Source: Shmoop Editorial Team. (November 11, 2008). *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798*. Retrieved August 4, 2011, from <http://www.shmoop.com/tintern-abbey/>



INVESTIGATING HIGH POWER WORDS!!

SYNONYM

DEFINITION

ANTONYM

(write word here)

PICTURE

SENTENCE

THE LYRICS OF THROUGH ALL THINGS

In a song, lyrics and melodies are woven together into music; when you think of one, you also hear the other.

Composers often find these special words for a song in poetry. For *Through All Things* composer Stephen Paulus chose a portion of a poem by the English poet, William Wordsworth.

Most people call the poem “Tintern Abbey” for short because the full title is very long:

***“Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour.
July 13, 1798.”***

You can see why everyone shortens it!

Paulus decided to write a song with Wordsworth’s poetry because he wanted words that expressed deep ideas. He thought that the students who sing the piece are more mature than most adults expect they are.

Who was Wordsworth

Poet William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850) was born in a beautiful region of Northwest England called the Lake District. His mother died when he was eight years old. After her death, he was sent to Hawkshead Grammar School, where his love of poetry was firmly established. In those days, the students at a grammar school ranged in age from eight or nine to teenagers. They usually studied Latin, Greek, English and mathematics.



Hawkeshead School

While Wordsworth was at Hawkshead, his father died. William and his four siblings were now orphans. Other family members helped them, and William went on to Cambridge University. Just before he graduated from Cambridge, he went on a walking tour of Europe. Wordsworth traveled to France, made new friends and experienced the French Revolution. When Wordsworth saw the “everyday” French people struggle with the issues in France, he developed sympathy and a deep interest in the troubles and hardships of ordinary people. He soon carried these feelings and ideas into his writing.

Back in England, he and his favorite sister, Dorothy, made a home together. He later married Mary Hutchinson, a childhood friend. They had five children.

Wordsworth- an Important Poet

Wordsworth was an influential poet. He and other writers became the founders of a big change in literature; they created a new literary movement called Romanticism.



This movement was not about love and marriage. But it was about writing poetry that everyday people could read about some VERY BIG IDEAS such as Nature, Beauty, Truth, and higher Emotions. He got things rolling for other Romantic Poets because he was successful – people liked and read his poetry. His book *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1798, was a big hit. And the last poem in that book was “Tintern Abbey.”

Before Romanticism, poetry was written with flowery language that was hard for people to understand. The subjects of poems were usually kings and queens, history or mythology. In *Lyrical*

Ballads, Wordsworth said that he would only write poems with "the real language of men." The people in his poems are ordinary folks like shepherds, farmers, and mothers.

In a nutshell, Wordsworth and his friends changed the poetry forever by making it an art for everyone.

What is Tintern Abbey?

An abbey is a place where monks or nuns live.



There is usually a church along with other buildings. Tintern Abbey was founded almost 900 years ago in 1131. The monks began building the Great Church in 1269. Today this ancient church ruin is the most visible part of Tintern Abbey.

The Catholic Abbey was closed by King Henry VIII in 1536 and the buildings and land were surrendered to the King. Valuables were sent to the royal treasury. Lead from the roof was valuable, so it was removed and sold. Without a roof, the building began to decay. The Wye River valley is famous its beauty. The river on the border between England and Wales.



What is Poem Saying?

On the surface, the poem is about a walk in a beautiful place, one that the poet remembers from a visit five years earlier. At a deeper level, the poet is reflecting on how he has changed over the past five year. He relives his memories and now looks more closely at his surroundings. He is older and wiser, and awed and amazed by the beauty of the world.

Stephen Paulus selected these lines for *Through All Things*.

*And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.*

The poet is saying that he feels a "presence" but we don't know what or who it is. Nature? God? It disturbs him, but with "joy," not bad thoughts. It lifts him up to higher thoughts about a presence of something very important that is woven into the whole of life and existence. This force is there in "the light of setting suns," and "the round ocean and the living air," in "the blue sky," and "in the mind of man." It is everywhere. The poet's words might remind someone alive today of the good side of the Force in the *Star Wars* stories.

The presence is "a motion and a spirit," that "impels," or activates all creatures and beings that have brains to think and the things they think about, in fact it "rolls through all things" and connects all things.

Through All Things was composed by Stephen Paulus in 2011, in St. Paul, Minnesota.