

Learner Resource 3 phonology in “Anahorish”

In “Anahorish” the speaker draws attention to the name itself (“soft gradient//of consonant, vowel meadow”), and the reader is encouraged to think about the shape and the sound (the phonology) of the name.

Look at the first verse of “Anahorish” below. Work in pairs to decode the colours: what do the sounds in each colour have in common with one another?

My “place of clear water”,

The first hill in the world

Where springs washed into

The shiny grass

In your pairs, one person reads the poem and the other chooses a colour and echoes that specific sound as your partner reads. For example, you may choose “l” so you would echo “hill” “in” “springs” etc.

Now choose another sound to echo. Discuss whether changing the emphasis to a different sound changes the tone of the poem, or shapes the meaning in any way.

As a class, find out whether everyone agrees about the predominant sound in the first verse and the effect it creates. You might, for example, argue that the sibilance is essential to the subject matter of the first verse.

Now highlight the rest of this poem, plotting out the trail of sound.

In pairs, and then in larger groups, discuss your observations. For example:

1. Are there verses where the “l” re-emerges? Why might this be?
2. Are there verses where a particular sound (noticeable in early verses) disappears completely?
3. Is there a single sound that dominates each verse? If so, what it is and why do you think the poet has used it?

In your pairs, look at the following statements about the structure of the poem, and find one link with your analysis of the phonology.

1. The structure of the poem moves from the speaker’s personal relationship with the place, to a more dream-like liminal space, before ending with an imagined version of the past.
2. Constructed of three sentences, the first focuses on the memory and the topography of the place (the hill, the springs), the second on the name itself (the sound, its appearance) and the third on the recreated history of the place.
3. The agents of the first two verbs in this poem (“washed” and “darkened”) are the springs, but the verb “swung” has no agent, in a sentence that forms a bridge between the physical, external world of “Anahorish” and the imagined world of the past. The final verse contains two verbs, and the tense moves from the past to the present.

