



World Words

Lament

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Student's Activities

Pre-listening Activity 1

In the poem you are going to hear, the poet refers to a number of animals which are the cause of her lament. Here are the animals. What do they have in common, and what do you think the lament is about?

green turtle
hook-beaked turtle
cormorant
dugong
dolphin
whale
tern
gull
wader



The poet also mentions some people, for whom she laments. What do they have in common. How might what they have in common affect the animals in the first group? In other words, can you see a cause and effect between the two groups?

gunsmith
armourer
boy fusilier
farmer's boy
Ahmed at the closed border



Pre-listening Activity 2

1. You will hear the poet talking about the poem and some students discussing their reaction to it. Read through the following comments which are made in the broadcast and decide first who was speaking - the poet or the students - and then decide if they were discussing personal **feelings** or perhaps the **victims** of war. On the other hand, they might have been focussing on visual **images** or else structural **form** and **language**. Then listen to the broadcast to check your answers.

- a. "Ahmed is just a typical name so he's a person trying to run away from Kuwait, trying to cross the border into a safer country."
- b. "This poem is the poet as observer. I was reading all the newspapers, watching television, listening to the radio, so every single image and every example ... was taken from research."
- c. "I believe she is grieving for the human race ... we will all go down at the hands of war."
- d. "My lament is, you could say, a set of verses that I am kind of singing in words that are sorrowing for the truth, for the cormorant, for the ocean itself, for the soldier, for all of those people.."
- e. "...on television, a picture of a cormorant covered in oil, so its blackness was the blackness of oil. As if it were attending its own funeral."
- f. "The way I understand it is that everything comes to an end and is more concentrated on death."
- g. "I want to know why the author focussed so much on the ocean and that animal that live in the ocean."
- h. "We are lied to. The 'ashes of language' refer to horrible phrases like 'collateral damage'."
- i. "The green turtle is lovely ...looking for a breeding ground but she lays her eggs she lays them in sea polluted by oil pouring out of a well."
- j. "I regard this lament as a cry from a member of the public from anywhere in the world, an outcry crying out against the appalling behaviour of people during any war."

| | feelings | victims | images | form & language |
|--------------|----------|---------|--------|-----------------|
| The poet | | | | |
| The students | | | | |



After Listening

A. Now you've heard the poem, try and answer these questions:



What one thing could cause *'their nest of sickness'*, *'veil of iridescence on the sand'* and a *'shadow on the sea'*? (From the first two stanzas)

What damage to the other **animals** is being caused? Which animals are already at a high risk of extinction?

What damage is being done to **people** in the poem? Are they victims or perpetrators of the damage?

What do you think the final line refers to?
'For vengeance, and the ashes of language'.



B. Language Point

How many verbs can you find in this poem? Why is this?

One way to think of the poem is as a list of the things that can be lamented for. In lists we don't usually use verbs because the action is always the same. (In a shopping list, the action is always 'to buy', in a 'to do' list the action is always, well, it's obvious really!)

C.

Project work:

Choose an animal which is threatened by human activity - war, industry, farming, expansion. What key words can describe this threat. Use these words to construct a brief lament for that animal. Perhaps it might be a list.

D. Discussion

In the interview, the poet claims to speak the truth while our politicians and military leaders tell lies. How true is her statement?