



Archaeology

Gaia Holmes

Teacher's Notes

This poem by Gaia Holmes regrets the inability of the poet to bury her past memories of a past lover. The poet uses the concept of 'archaeology' (the word only appears in the title) to refer to emotions that she thought she had 'laid to rest' being dug up by chance memories triggered by random events. We might trace these random events occurring through one or more of the five senses and in ordinary, everyday situations.

Pre-listening

1. Most people will choose the older times. The Oxford Concise Dictionary defines archaeology as the '*study of human antiquities, especially of the prehistoric period, and usually by excavation.*' If prompted, most students would not choose answer a) as being too recent.

2. The purpose of this question, plus question 1, is to bring the student to the acceptance that this term might be used to refer to unearthing of very recent things. Though unusual, it is a fine example of poetic licence at work!

3. This introduces the student to the idea that the poet is referring to something personal as an archaeological artefact.

- (students will have their own explanations but:) possible something to painful or distressing to keep in the forefront of the mind
- Something distressing, such as a death, a rejection, a failure etc
- Very possibly, though that person might be the poet themselves.

4. This is a personal choice for the student to make. Many people would agree that smell is possibly the most evocative of the senses for recalling hidden memories, but not everyone will agree. If your students can be persuaded to try this, then get them to think of a event (but not one that happened within the previous 48 hours) that happened to them; get them to close their eyes and they have to associate each of the five senses with that memory – in other words they should try to evoke a specific memory of one of each of the five senses associated with that event. Which one was the easiest to recall? They don't have tell anyone what that event was.

- This is a personal activity and you cannot ask students to share it though they might volunteer.

Shakespeare's Sonnet 141 uses the 5 senses as the basis of its argument:

In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes,
For they in thee a thousand errors note;
But 'tis my heart that loves what they despise,
Who, in despite of view, is pleased to dote.
Nor are mine ears with thy tongue's tune delighted;
Nor tender feeling, to base touches prone,
Nor taste, nor smell, desire to be invited,
To any sensual feast with thee alone;
But my five wits nor my five senses can
Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee,
Who leaves unswayed the likeness of a man,
Thy proud heart's slave and vassal wretch to be;

Only my plague thus far I count my gain,
That she that makes me sin awards me pain.

After Listening

1.

You can burn photographs of faces but their contours still cling to your skin,	←	touch
You can define your past as history; seal it in an envelope marked <i>Forget</i> ,	←	sight
but it returns to you as a mantra, in a certain kind of light, with the scent	←	smell
of rain-soaked tarmac or the taste of oysters	←	taste
and his look hits you	←	touch
with all the force of a fossil thrown against the soft part of your chest,	←	smell (also hearing?)
his look cuts you as you chop garlic,	←	
his look exhumes every emotion that you've ever laid to rest.		

2. 'his look' is a memory triggered by the senses as shown above. Perhaps the look is an accusing one, or reproachful, or loving or get the students to explore the kind of look it might be.

What 'his look' undoes is the work of the poet who is trying to bury or forget the relationship. One might argue that 'his look' or the five senses are, in fact, the archaeologist.