

Understanding Eiseley's Style in "The Flow of the River"

GRADE LEVEL

Grades 9-12

SUBJECTS

English, Language Arts

ESTIMATED TIME

One or two 50-minute sessions

*"If there is magic on
this planet, it is
contained in water."*

OVERVIEW

The following activity asks students to read Eiseley's essay "The Flow of the River" and then to investigate his unique writing style.

MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY

- A copy of the essay "The Flow of the River" from *The Loren Eiseley Reader*
- The handout accompanying this lesson plan.

PREPARATION

1. Read Eiseley's essay, "The Flow of the River," and make sure there are enough copies of the essay for each student.
2. Make copies of all handouts and have all materials available for use.

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

In this series of lessons, students will

- understand what is meant by 'literary style,'

- be able to identify elements of literary style in a text, and
- understand some of the traits that make Eiseley's writing unique.

PROJECT SEQUENCE

After reading the essay "The Flow of the River," reading the introduction to the handout "Style: The Flow of the River" is recommended to begin the lesson.

This activity can be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups, and would be a helpful way to begin a discussion about style. This activity (or a some version of it) should probably come before any activity that asks students to write "in the style of Eiseley."

Style: "The Flow of the River"

Introduction

One of the things Loren Eiseley was known for was his unique writing style. But what is writing style?

Style in writing is defined as, "the manner of expression of a particular writer, produced by choice of words, grammatical structures, use of literary devices, and all the possible uses of language." Sounds complicated, but think about it this way: it's *how* you do something vs. *what* you do. In writing, it is as easy as the contrast between these two sentences:

"There was sand on everything." VS. "Flying sand as light as powder coated every exposed object like snow."

The subjects are the same, but how they are written about is very different. That is style. Here is a brief list of the ways Eiseley's writing was considered unique:

- Loren Eiseley's work is known for its richness and the **beauty of his language and metaphors**;
- for his **ability to portray the long, slow passage of time** and the meaning of the past in the present;
- for his **portrayal of the relationships** among all living things;
- for the way he articulates his **concern about the future**.

DIRECTIONS: In the questions that follow, each of these points has been isolated, and an example of the point from Eiseley's writings has been placed in the box. Go back into the essay "The Flow of the River," find examples of each element of Eiseley's style, and write the example underneath the box. There are many examples of each element throughout.

1. "The beauty of his language and metaphors."

"Fire, as we have learned to our cost, has an insatiable hunger to be fed."

"The Last Neanderthal," p. 131

Write your example here:

2. **"The ability to portray the long, slow passage of time."**

"Sometime, sitting there in the mountain sunshine above prairie dog town, I could imagine the attraction of that open world after the fern forest damp or the croaking gloom of carboniferous swamps. There by a tree root I could almost make him out, that shabby little Paleocene rat, eternal tramp and world wanderer, father of all mankind. He ruffled his coat in the sun and hopped forward for a seed. It was to be a long time before he would be seen on the grass again, but he was trying to make up his mind. For good or ill there was to be one more chance, but that chance was fifty million years away."

"The Slit," p. 10

Write your example here:

3. **"For his portrayal of the relationships between all living things."**

"The borders of our worlds had shifted. It was the fog that had done it. That crow, and I knew him well, never under normal circumstances flew low near men. He had been lost all right, but it was more than that. He had thought he was high up, and when he encountered me looming gigantically through the fog, he had perceived a ghastly and, to the crow mind, unnatural sight. He had seen a man walking on air, desecrating the very heart of the crow kingdom, a harbinger of the most profound evil a crow mind could conceive of—air-walking men. The encounter, he must have thought, had taken place a hundred feet above ground."

"The Judgment of the Birds," p. 45

Write your example here:

4. **"For his ability to articulate his concern for the future."**

"As an anthropologist I know that we exist in the morning twilight of humanity and pray that we may survive its noon."

"Prologue from Invisible Pyramid," p. 1-2

Write your example here:

5. Find another example of any one of the above points and write it below.