Before Reading

Mi Madre
Poem by Pat Mora

Canyon de Chelly
Poem by Simon J. Ortiz

What gifts does the Earth provide?

It’s not hard to appreciate nature when you’re taking a walk on a sunny day or swimming at a scenic beach. But the earth gives us many gifts that we may not always recognize. The gas that warms our homes, the concrete we use to pave our sidewalks, even the paper we write on—these things are all precious resources provided to us by the earth. The poets whose works you’re about to read share their appreciation for the earth’s gifts through words.

LIST IT The earth’s resources can be used in multiple ways. In a small group, choose one of the resources shown, and brainstorm at least five ways we can use it. Did you discover any new uses for these resources? Share your list with the class.
**TEXT ANALYSIS: IMAGERY**

The use of description that makes something seem real or easy to imagine is called **imagery**. Poets create imagery by using words and phrases that appeal to our senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Paying attention to imagery can enable you to “experience” a poem as if you were there. For example, look at the following lines from “Mi Madre”:

*I say tease me.*

*She sprinkles raindrops in my face on a sunny day.*

The image “sprinkles raindrops” appeals to the sense of touch, while “sunny day” appeals to the sense of sight. If you combine these images in your mind, you can almost share in this scene. As you read “Mi Madre” and “Canyon de Chelly,” use a word web to keep track of these and other examples of imagery.

**READING SKILL: UNDERSTAND SPEAKER**

In poetry, the **speaker** is the voice that “talks” to the reader and relates the ideas presented in the poem from a specific point of view. It is important to understand that the speaker is not the same as the poet. For example, a poet may choose to write about a subject from the perspective of a child. In that case, the ideas that are expressed are those of the child, not necessarily the poet. As you read “Mi Madre” and “Canyon de Chelly,” look for clues that will help you decide who each speaker is and how he or she feels about the subject of the poem.

**BACKGROUND TO THE POEMS**

Arizona’s Canyon de Chelly (pronounced *sha*) is home to a Navajo tribal community that has preserved this sacred land for centuries. The canyon, now a national park, is known for its stunning landscapes, tribal artifacts, and rock paintings.
Mi Madre

Pat Mora

I say feed me.
She serves red prickly pear on a spiked cactus.

I say tease me.
She sprinkles raindrops in my face on a sunny day.

I say frighten me.
She shouts thunder, flashes lightning.

I say comfort me.
She invites me to lay on her firm body.

I say heal me.
She gives me manzanilla, orégano, dormilón.

I say caress me.
She strokes my skin with her warm breath.

I say make me beautiful.
She offers turquoise for my fingers, a pink blossom for my hair.

I say sing to me.
She chants lonely women’s songs of femaleness.

I say teach me.
She endures: glaring heat
numbing cold
frightening dryness.

She: the desert
She: strong mother.

1. Mi Madre (më mäˈdrə) Spanish: my mother.
2. manzanilla, orégano, dormilón (mänˈza-nāˈña, o-rēˈgo-nō, dôr-mēˈlōn′) Spanish: sweet-smelling herbs that can be used to make home medicines.
fine art
desert landscape with cactus, pink blossom, turquoise
can use photo if a stunning one is found
Lie on your back on stone,
the stone carved to fit
the shape of yourself.
Who made it like this,
knowing that I would be along
in a million years and look
at the sky being blue forever?

My son is near me. He sits
and turns on his butt
and crawls over to stones,
picks one up and holds it,
and then puts it into his mouth.
The taste of stone.
What is it but stone,
the earth in your mouth.
You, son, are tasting forever.
preferably a fine art image of this canyon. An image of the edge of a cliff looking into the canyon with fields, sand furrows, and cottonwoods visible. If a stunning photo is found, it can be used.
We walk to the edge of cliff
and look down into the canyon.
On this side, we cannot see
the bottom cliff edge but looking
further out, we see fields,
sand furrows, cottonwoods.
In winter, they are softly gray.
The cliffs’ shadows are distant,
hundreds of feet below;
we cannot see our own shadows.
The wind moves softly into us.
My son laughs with the wind;
he gasps and laughs.

We find gray root, old wood,
so old, with curious twists
in it, curving back into curves,
juniper, piñon, or something
with hard, red berries in spring.
You taste them, and they are sweet
and bitter, the berries a delicacy
for bluejays. The plant rooted
fragilely into a sandy place
by a canyon wall, the sun bathing
shiny, pointed leaves.

My son touches the root carefully,
aware of its ancient quality.
He lays his soft, small fingers on it
and looks at me for information.
I tell him: wood, an old root,
and around it, the earth, ourselves.

Reread lines 27–29. Add the images in these lines to your web. What emotions do these images suggest?

Reread lines 41–46. Why do you think the speaker brings his son to the canyon?
Comprehension

1. **Recall** In “Mi Madre,” how does the desert heal the speaker?

2. **Recall** In “Canyon de Chelly,” what two things does the speaker’s son taste?

3. **Represent** Reread lines 13–14 from “Mi Madre” and lines 17–22 from “Canyon de Chelly.” Choose one of these groups of lines and sketch the image created in your mind.

Text Analysis

4. **Interpret Poem** In “Mi Madre,” the speaker refers to the desert as a “strong mother.” How is the desert in the poem like a mother?

5. **Make Inferences** Reread the first three lines of “Canyon de Chelly.” To whom do you think the speaker is talking? Why do you think so?

6. **Compare and Contrast Speakers** Using a Y-chart like the one shown, fill in the top part with what you know about each speaker’s relationship to the earth. Include the gifts he or she receives from it and how he or she feels about it. How are these relationships similar? Then cross out the similarities and write them in the bottom part.

7. **Evaluate Imagery** Both “Mi Madre” and “Canyon de Chelly” are about real places the poets have visited. Review the imagery webs you created. Which poem’s imagery best helped you to picture the subject of the poem?

Extension and Challenge

8. **Creative Project: Poetry** Think of a place in the outdoors that you enjoy. Jot down notes about how the place looks, smells, feels, sounds, or tastes. Then write a poem about the place. Be sure to include imagery that appeals to at least three of the five senses.

9. **SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION** The Navajo, or Diné, make up the largest Native American nation in the United States. Research their history and traditions, including their preservation of Canyon de Chelly as a national landmark. Share your findings with a group.

What gifts does the EARTH provide?

Now that you have read the poems, what other gifts might you add to your list?