# From *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*

*A minstrel (singer) is singing a story to his audience. He is already about halfway through his story, but he has taken a break. He starts in the present by saying that the Teviot river seems peaceful; it has been a long time since fighting happened there. The minstrel then thinks back to the death of his son, who died fighting alongside a great military leader, whom Scott refers to as both Dundee and Graham. The word ‘Now,’ in the fourth stanza indicates that the minstrel is returning to his story. In his story, there is a fight between warring families. The people at the Teviot are waiting for an attack.*

* The Teviot is a river
* Bale fires were lit to warn people of invaders
* Wind’st refers to the river winding through the countryside
* The Teviot shows The Tweed
* ‘Started’ = moved suddenly (in this case in response to a loud noise)
* Time is compared to a river here. Human time carries every sadness with it from the beginning of time.
* The singer remembers his son who died in battle. This is one of the sad moments that humans cannot forget.
* A musket is a kind of gun. The minstrel, who is a musician, thinks of the firing of the gun as a type of music.
* The minstrel is still thinking about his son.

Sweet Teviot, on thy silver side

The glaring bale-fires blaze no more;

No longer steel-clad warriors ride

Along thy wild and willowed shore;

Where’er thou wind’st by dale or hill,

All, all is peaceful, all is still,

As if thy waves, since Time was born,

Since first they rolled their way to Tweed,

Had only heard the shepherd’s reed,

Nor started at the bugle-horn.

Unlike the tide of human time,

Which, though it change in ceaseless flow,

Retains each grief, retains each crime,

Its earliest course was doomed to know;

And, darker as it downward bears,

Is stained with past and present tears.

Low as that tide has ebbed with me,

It still reflects to memory’s eye

The hour, my brave, my only boy

Fell by the side of the great Dundee.

Why, when the volleying musket played

Against the bloody Highland blade,

Why was not I beside him laid!

Enough–he died the death of fame;

Enough–he died with conquering Graeme.

* The minstrel goes back in time to his story, which takes place during a battle between different families. He picks up the story at a time when attackers are coming and everyone is afraid.
* ‘pent’ – the animals were taken to the tower for better defence.
* Dun = brown
* ‘southern ravage’ = the attackers from the south have begun their attack.
* Heedful = paying attention
* Watt Tinlinn is a new character; we do not know anything about him yet.

Now, over Border dale and fell,

Full wide and far was terror spread;

For pathless marsh, and mountain cell,

The peasant left his lowly shed.

The frightened flocks and herds were pent

Beneath the peel’s rude battlement;

And maids and matrons dropped the tear,

While ready warriors seized the spear.

From Branksome’s towers, the watchman’s eye

Dun wreaths of distant smoke can spy,

Which, curling in the rising sun,

Showed southern ravage was begun.

Now loud the heedful gate-ward cried

“Prepare ye all for blows and blood!

Watt Tinlinn, from the Liddel-side.

Comes wading through the flood.Comprehension Questions:

1. Look at stanza one. What sound used to be heard by the Teviot?
2. And what sound is heard now?
3. What other difference does the minstrel draw attention to between the past and the present?
4. How many sons did the minstrel have?
5. What weapons were used in the battle that Graeme fought in?
6. Did Graeme win?
7. In the present time of the poem, where have all the people and animals gone?
8. What two things does the watchman see from Branksome tower?

## Development Questions:

1. How does Walter Scott create a sense of peacefulness in the first stanza?
2. Alliteration is when words start with the same sound e.g. dirty dog. Find an example of alliteration in the poem. What effect does it have?

## Discussion Questions:

1. How has a place near you changed over time?
2. What do you think will happen next?

# Answers

## Comprehension Questions:

1. Look at stanza one. What sound used to be heard by the Teviot?

The bugle horn

1. And what sound is heard now?

The shepherd’s reed

1. What other difference does the minstrel draw attention to between the past and the present?

There used to be warriors but now everything is peaceful.

1. How many sons did the minstrel have?

One

1. What weapons were used in the battle that Graeme fought in?

Muskets

1. Did Graeme win?

Yes

1. In the present time of the poem, where have all the people and animals gone?

To the tower (for protection)

1. What two things does the watchman see from Branksome tower?

Smoke and Watt Tinlinn

## Development Questions:

1. How does Walter Scott create a sense of peacefulness in the first stanza?

Accept anything that the pupil can justify. A good answer is the way the repetition and parenthetical comment slows down the line ‘All, all is peaceful, all is still’. The pupils might also notice the softness caused by the repeated oh sound.

1. Alliteration is when words start with the same sound e.g. dirty dog. Find an example of alliteration in the poem. What effect does it have?

Pupil’s own choice could include

* Bale-fires blaze – the b sound suggests action, which helps the reader visualise the fire
* Wild and willowed – the w sound is very soft, which helps establish a relaxed tone
* Darker downward – the d sound is hard, reflecting the negative description
* Past and present – the aspirated p sound reflects the idea of something go on forever
* Maids and matrons – the alliteration connects the two together