



Dear session participants for 'The Awe of Them Came On Me': Ursula K. Le Guin and the Power of Trees',

We hope this finds you well! Please see the attached handout, as you may want to read it in advance if you have time. Additionally, as our session includes a participatory creative activity, please gather paper and a pen OR paper and drawing pencils/watercolours, so that you will have these on hand for the creative section.

We look forward to meeting you and co-creating with you on Tuesday afternoon!

Best wishes,
Liesl King and Alison Dyke

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Handout for 'The Awe of Them Came On Me': Ursula K. Le Guin and the Power of Trees'

1) Extract from 'Vaster than Empires, and More Slow', by Ursula K. Le Guin (1971)

"How can the fear be here too?" she said, and her voice range flat and false in the terrific silence.

"It's not just the trees, the grasses..."

"But we're twelve thousand kilos from where we were this morning, we left it on the other side of the planet."

"It's all one," Osden said. "One big green thought. How long does it take a thought to get from one side of your brain to the other?"

"It doesn't think. It isn't thinking," Harfex said, lifelessly. "It's merely a network of processes. The branches, the epiphytic growths, the roots with those nodal junctures between individuals: they must all be capable of transmitting electrochemical impulses. There are no individual plants, then, properly speaking. Even the pollen is part of the linkage, no doubt, a sort of windbourne sentience, connecting overseas. But it is not conceivable. That all the biosphere of a planet should be one network of communications, sensitive, irrational, immortal, isolated..."

"Isolated," said Osden. "That's it! That's the fear. It isn't that we're motile, or destructive. It's just that we are. We are other. There has never been any other."

"You're right," Mannon said, almost whispering. "It has no peers. No enemies. No relationship with anything but itself. One alone forever."

"Then what's the function of its intelligence in species-survival?"

"None, maybe," Osden said. "Why are you getting teleological, Harfex? Aren't you a Hainishman? Isn't the measure of complexity the measure of eternal joy?"

2) Extract from 'Imaginary Countries', Ursula K. Le Guin (1973)

'Where are you off to? It's hot.' There was no time for stopping and talking. "Back soon," Stanislas replied politely and went on, up the road in dust and sunlight, past the High Cliff where his half-brother Paul was digging. He stopped to survey the engineering. Roads metalled with white clay zigzagged over the cliff-face. The Citroen and the Rolls were parked near a bridge spanning an erosion-gully. A tunnel had been pierced and was in process of enlargement. "Good tunnel," Stanislaus said. Radiant and filthy, the engineer replied, "It'll be ready to drive through this evening, you want to come to the ceremony?" Stanislas nodded, and went on. His road led up a long, high hillslope, but he soon turned from it and, leaping the ditch, entered his kingdom and the kingdom of the trees. Within a few steps all dust and bright light were gone. Leaves overhead and underfoot; an air like green water through which birds swam and the dark trunks rose lifting their burdens their crowns, towards the other element, the sky. Stanislas went first to the Oak and stretched his arms out, straining to reach a quarter of the way around the trunk. His chest and cheek were pressed against the harsh, scored bark; the smell of it and its shelf-fungi and moss was in his nostrils and the

darkness of it in his eyes. It was a bigger thing than he could ever hold. It was very old, and alive, and did not know that he was there. Smiling, he went on quietly, a notebook full of maps in his pocket, among the trees towards yet-uncharted regions of his land.

3) Extract from *The Dispossessed*, by Ursula K. Le Guin (1974)

At night in the Project camps, everybody coughed, in the daytime they coughed less; they were too busy to cough. The dust was their enemy, the fine dry stuff that clogged the throat and lungs, their enemy and their charge, their hope. Once that dust had lain rich and dark in the shade of trees. After their long work, it might do so again.

She brings the green leaf from the stone.

From heart of rock clear water running...

Gimar was always humming the tune, and now in the hot evening returning to camp over the plain she sang the words aloud.

'Who does? Who's "she"?' asked Shevek.

Gimar smiled. Her broad, silky face was smeared and caked with dust, her hair was full of dust, she smelled strongly and agreeably of sweat.

'I grew up in Southrising,' she said. 'Where the miners are. It's a miner's song.'

'What miners?'

'Don't you know? People that were already here when the Settlers came. Some of them stayed and joined the solidarity. Gold miners, tin-miners. They still have some feast days and songs of their own. The tadde was a miner, he used to sing me that when I was little.'

'Well, then, who's "she"?''

'I don't know. It's just what the song says. Isn't it what we're doing here? Bringing green leaves out of stones!'

'Sounds like religion.'

'You and your fancy book words. It's just a song. Oh, I wish we were back in the other camp and could have a swim. I stink!'

'I stink.'

4) Extract from 'The Direction of the Road', by Ursula K. Le Guin (1974)

With the presence of many motorcars on the road at once, a new level of skill was required of me. As a mere seedling, as soon as I got my head above the weeds, I had learned the basic trick of going two directions at once. I learned it without thinking about it, under the simple pressure of circumstances on the first occasion that I was a walker in the East and a horseman facing him in the West. I had to go two directions at once, and I did so. It's something we trees master without real effort, I suppose. I was nervous, but I succeeded in passing the rider and then shrinking away from him while at the same time I was still jigjogging towards the walker, and indeed passed him (no looming, back in those days!) only when I had got quite out of sight of the rider. I was proud of myself, being very young, that at first time I did it; but it sounds more difficult than it really is. Since those days of course I had done it innumerable times, and thought nothing about it; I could do it in my sleep. But have you ever considered the feat accomplished, the skill involved, when a tree enlarges, simultaneously, yet at slightly different rates and in slightly different manners, for each one of forty motorcar drivers facing two opposite directions, while at the same time remembering to loom over each single one at the right moment: and to do this minute after minute, hour after hour, from daybreak till nightfall or long after?

For my road had become a busy one; it worked all day long under almost continual traffic. It worked, and I worked. I did not jounce and bounce so much anymore, but I had to run faster and faster: to grow enormously, to loom in a split second, to shrink to nothing, all in a hurry, without time to enjoy the action, and without rest: over and over and over.

Very few of the drivers bothered to look at me, not even a seeing glance. They seemed, indeed, not to see any more. They merely stared ahead. They seemed to believe that they were 'going somewhere'. Little mirrors were affixed to the front of their cars at which they glanced to see where they had been; then they stared ahead again. I had thought that only beetles had this delusion of Progress. Beetles are always rushing about, and never looking up. I had always had a pretty low opinion of beetles. But at least they let me be.

5) Extract from *Lavinia*, by Ursula K. Le Guin (2009)

No one was at the sacred place, but there had been recent sacrifices: fresh fleeces lay on the ground and a stack of unburned wood by the altar. I scattered salted meal on the altar and all about the enclosure and wished I could light a little fire, but I had brought none. So I went to the springs while the sun was still up and, sitting on a rocky outcrop above the cave mouth, I watched the light grow reddish across the misty pools and I listened to the troubled voice of the water. After a while I moved farther up the hill, where I could hear birds singing near and in the silence. The presence of the trees was very strong. For the first time I wondered if I might hear the voice that my father heard speak from among them in the dark. The big oaks stood so many, so massive in their other life, in their deep, rooted silence: the awe of them came on me, the religion. I went back to the sacred enclosure praying, very humbly beseeching these great powers to have pity on my weakness. I was glad I had lit no fire. I made a heap of the fleeces, rolled up in my red edged toga, for the air was cool, and lay down in the late dusk to sleep.

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