

The Great Serpent Mound, located in Adams County, Ohio, is a human-made mound of earth that researchers believe was created between 300 B.C. and A.D. 1100 by an indigenous culture.

Serpent Mound

Ohio, 1846

Brush Creek stood low when the museum men came
with their measuring tapes and sketchbooks.

It was winter. Fringed with ice,
the creek doubled back on itself
as if it had forgotten something.

Pa was in Cincinnati, or else on his way home,
so Ma told me to lead the men
into the marshy low grounds. It being winter,
there was little underbrush to speak of—
in the summer there would have been
briars, poison ivy, biting flies. I listened
for the *swish* of a beaver's heavy tail,
the chitter of a chickadee, or the cry of a hawk,
but the winter silence of the creek pressed
down on all of us like a weight.

The humps in the ground were all but
invisible until you were right up on them. The figure
was even less obvious: the sinuous body,
the tail coiled three times around,
and at the other end, the mouth wide open.

In the summer the creek bottom was crowded
with so much life that you could trip over
the ridges of earth before you saw
anything at all. In winter you could climb
a tree and get some idea of the whole thing:
the serpent's body undulating, slithering
silently across the ancient

earth. At the mouth end, there was an oval mound
as if the snake were about to swallow an egg—
as snakes sometimes did in our rickety
henhouse—my Pa always said, or
as if swallowing the sun, one of the museum
men suggested, taking notes with his quill pen,
an old-style inkhorn slung at his side.

I liked that: swallowing the sun,
just the sort of thing a snake might do,
might want to do. When, later, I told my sister Ruth,
she disagreed. It is singing to the sun,
she insisted. That is why its mouth
is wide open. She said, "Sometimes I think
I hear it on summer nights. Not swallowing, singing."

42. How does the poem's form contribute to the poem's meaning?
- E. The use of one continuous stanza and the pattern of the lines mimic the long and winding shape of the mound.
 - F. The uneven line lengths emphasize the variety of ways people interpret the meaning of the mound.
 - G. The dashes throughout the poem highlight the speaker's changing thoughts about the significance of the mound.
 - H. The lack of a regular rhyme scheme and meter convey that the speaker struggles to comprehend the vastness of the mound.
43. Which lines reveal how the setting affects the speaker and the men from the museum?
- A. "It being winter, / there was little underbrush to speak of—" (lines 8–9)
 - B. "but the winter silence of the creek pressed / down on all of us like a weight." (lines 14–15)
 - C. "The humps in the ground were all but / invisible until you were right up on them." (lines 16–17)
 - D. "In the summer the creek bottom was crowded / with so much life that you could trip" (lines 21–22)
44. Lines 1–2 contribute to the development of ideas in the poem by
- E. suggesting that the men are too busy with their work to talk to the speaker.
 - F. helping establish the reason for the men's visit and purposeful behavior.
 - G. hinting that the men have hidden motives for studying the mound.
 - H. indicating why the speaker is fascinated by the men and wants to help them.
45. Read line 28 from the poem.

At the mouth end, there was an oval mound

How does the line contribute to the development of ideas in the poem?

- A. It describes a feature of the mound that the men from the museum need to document.
- B. It introduces a comparison of the body of the mound with the head of the mound.
- C. It introduces a feature of the mound that has a different meaning to different people.
- D. It describes a part of the mound that is difficult to see from far away.

- 46.** What impact do the phrases “all but / invisible” and “even less obvious” in lines 16–18 have on the meaning of the poem?
- E.** They indicate that viewing the full size and shape of the mound is difficult.
 - F.** They suggest that the location of the mound is unknown to most people.
 - G.** They imply that the speaker wants the location of the mound to remain a secret.
 - H.** They reveal that the speaker is unfamiliar with the significance of the mound.
- 47.** What impact do the words “swish,” “chitter,” and “cry” in lines 12–13 have in the poem?
- A.** They illustrate how lively the mound’s surroundings are during the summer.
 - B.** They show how the mound disrupts natural life in the marsh.
 - C.** They indicate the variety of wildlife found in the area around the mound.
 - D.** They suggest that the speaker prefers the mound’s appearance in winter.
- 48.** How does the speaker’s interaction with Ruth in lines 37–41 convey a central idea of the poem?
- E.** It suggests that the most accurate interpretations of the mound come from knowing the purpose of the mound.
 - F.** It emphasizes that there are multiple interpretations of the mound based on feelings and experiences.
 - G.** It reveals the benefit of considering different interpretations of the mound’s significance.
 - H.** It implies that scientific study of the mound’s purpose will affect what the mound symbolizes to people.
- 49.** The poet contrasts the speaker’s and Ruth’s points of view regarding the mound by using dialogue to
- A.** imply that Ruth is worried that her interpretation of the mound will be seen as too abstract.
 - B.** indicate that Ruth hopes her interpretation of the mound will be shared by the men from the museum.
 - C.** suggest that Ruth wants the speaker to agree with her interpretation of the mound.
 - D.** show that Ruth has already decided on her interpretation of the mound.