

***The Song Beneath the Ice* by Joe Fiorito**
(winner 2003 City of Toronto Book Award)

Study Guide by Janet Somerville

Introduction

“If people could see into my heart I should feel ashamed. To me everything is cold—cold as ice.”

~W.A. Mozart

Main Characters

DOMINIC AMORUSO

- concert pianist
- lives in Gould’s shadow

JOE SERAFINO

- Toronto journalist and childhood friend to Amoruso

Setting

A) Toronto

B) The Far North

Premise

Concert pianist disappears from a command performance at the AGO. One year later his friend receives a package in the mail of audiotapes and journals posted from Wolf Cove, NWT one year later.

He decides to order them and listen to the tapes and transcribe them to discern what has happened to his friend.

Amoruso’s fascination with word play: ANAGRAMS

e.g. meat loaf: tame foal
A fair trade: a far tirade

Reading for Detail
QUIZ #1 (pp. 1-45)

Each correct response is worth ½ mark.

/5 marks

Where was Dominic Amoruso performing “Pictures at an Exhibition” when he couldn’t finish the piece?

Name one of Dom’s “post-performance haunts”—restaurants he regularly visits in Toronto.

What clownish prank did someone pull routinely on the statue of Glenn Gould outside the CBC studios?

Name one of the items inside the package that Joe receives posted from the Northwest Territories.

What kind of jacket did Dom like to wear when he performed?

From what kind of medical condition does Dom frequently suffer?

Although Dom is discreetly taping the sounds at Fran’s Restaurant, who does he offend?

How did Dom account for being snapped in a photo with strippers at Filmore’s?

Where is Dom’s studio?

What stunt did Gould suggest Amoruso pull while he was performing on stage—one that would reinforce his reputation as a “punk pianist”?

Reading for Detail
QUIZ # 2 (pp. 45-108)

/5 marks

Each correct response is worth ½ mark.

What instrument was the Polish/Ukrainian man playing in the Bloor subway where Dom stopped to listen?

What does Daniel Keane (a.k.a. Bodhan Kenk a.k.a. Buddy) have in common with Dom?

What statues can Dom see when he's having lunch at his favourite Vietnamese restaurant on Bloor Street west of Bay Street?

To which Canadian city does Buddy suggest that Dom "sneak out of town" and "turn up unannounced and play?"

What does Buddy mean by suggesting to Dom to "pull a Gould?" (Give ONE of Dom's responses.)

Who is Anne Langelier?

How is Dom connected to Edward Weller, the financier?

Who is Claire?

With what Scandinavian musician is Dom obsessed?

Why are the "Hartmann drawings" important to the director of the AGO?

BONUS: Unscramble the following anagram to make the name of a character who was present at the Walker Court in the AGO the evening Dom disappeared:

chart some rat: _____

Reading for Detail
QUIZ # 3 (pp. 108-176)

/5 marks

Each correct response is worth ½ mark.

Why does Dom's piano teacher Lupo insist he go to Spain? (What architecture does he want Dom to see?)

In Barcelona, why do you think Dom tips the taxi driver as much as he paid for his dope?

“Offered a choice between a mediocre piano and a bad one” what does Dom choose?

Who is Carol Paterson?

Who is Maisela Singer?

What drink triggers Dom's memory about his “late brother's christening?”

How did Dom's father arrange for the family's piano?

How did he arrange for piano lessons for Dom? (Who taught Dom?)

How can you tell Dom likes Frank Mazur, the piano tuner at the AGO?

What does Charlie Wilson tell Dom about the setting for the A.Y. Jackson painting they both admire?

Name ONE of the items on Wilson's “elegantly proportioned table” in his office.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT (177-189)

List 5 important points that you learn in the entries about the following characters.

How is the plot moved forward?

What character traits are revealed or enhanced about Dom?

Copy ONE RELEVANT QUOTATION about each character.

a) MAISELA SINGER (177-184)

Quotation:

b) CAROL PATTERSON (184-186)

Quotation:

c) CLAIRE WELLER (186-189)

Quotation:

Guided note-taking (pp. 190-203)

FACTS

- 1) failure of SYNESTHESIA
- 2) plans to compose “The Idea of Here” (reminiscent of Gould’s “The Idea of North”)

Dom deconstructs pre-concert rituals:

- pumiced fingers—*safecracker’s trick*==*a way of heightening the sense of touch* (191)
a little pain is a tool in the regulation of the attack (192)
- took preventative pills
- prepared light meal of toast and eggs
- cuts finger with *dull knife: fun killed* (202)

CONNECTION TO CLAIRE who is undergoing a surgical knife for her abortion (of his child).

APOTEMNOPHELIACS

- fetishists who *seek the subtlety of subtraction* (194)
- *the erasure of the self* (194)
- Dom remembers amputees and his fascination of stumps—staring at what is not there

Dom’s recurring nightmare

...my fingertips sliced in the tips like quills....drops of blood instead of sap

Dom’s scars

*webbing between the thumb and forefinger, his “octave makers”

Guided note-taking (pp. 203-253)

Check out the link to the Hartmann Drawings upon which Musorgsky based his composition.

<http://www.stmoroky.com/reviews/gallery/pictures/hartmann.htm>

Dom deconstructs his performance of Musorgsky’s “Pictures at an Exhibition” movement by movement. (pp. 203-211) Write one comment of his for each:

1. Promenade
2. The Gnome
3. Promenade
4. Il Vecchio Castello

5. Promenade
6. The Tuileries
7. Bydlo
8. Promenade
9. Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks
10. Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle
11. Promenade
12. The Market at Limoges
13. The Catacombs
14. The House on Hen's Legs
15. The Knight's Gate at Kiev

List what Joe learns from his conversation with Lec (the security guard who took care of Dom at the AGO) (pp 213-217)

Describe Etulu.

What are Dom's impressions of Ed Stucky?

Using descriptive detail about the community, create a vivid picture of Wolf Cove based on Dom's first impressions. (233-246)

How does Claire haunt Dom?

Who is Arthur Parsons and why is he important?

Reading for Detail

QUIZ # 4 (pp. 177-253)

Each correct response is worth ½ mark.

/6 marks

Who plays “like a man off his rocker?”

What part of Dom does Carol Paterson want to shoot?

What does Claire disclose to Dom before his performance of “Pictures at an Exhibition” because she knows he doesn’t “like surprises?”

Who is Lec?

How does Lec help Dom on the night of the recital at the AGO?

To what medical procedure is Joe referring when he writes that Dom would have turned “dilation... into I laid not?”

From what city airport did Dom book a flight to Wolf Cove, Baffin Island?

Why does Etulu call Dom a “kabloona?”

Describe the photos Ed Stuckey keeps in his briefcase.

Why are the other people flying to Baffin Island amused by Dom’s appearance?

Who is Arthur Parsons?

Name something you could purchase at Northern Ventures.

Wolf Cove
(pp. 253-303)

Dom's Emotional State

Do you understand how close I am to cracking up? (262)

-ravens on the hydro line : *as if notes of Musorgsky had been inked in air* (264)

-Arthur Parsons suggests that Dom has *a case of the vapours* (265)

Gould's IDEA OF NORTH

- radio documentary in 1967
- spliced voices of southerners completely unprepared for the north
- did not interview the Inuu

(not authentic representation of the north according to Dom)

THEME OF BELONGING

- *an outsider until you stop asking for directions*
- no signs; no sidewalks; no street names

CHARACTERS

A) Etulu

- * sculptor
- * served jail time for murdering his wife's lover
- * carving a woman's head on the body of a fish (1st sculpture not a polar bear—
therefore, he is beginning to heal)

LEGEND OF SEDNA

- goddess of the sea
- **dismemberment** *chopped off her fingers with an axe. Also her hands and arms. She fell back into the water. Her fingers became the fishes.* (277)

Dom/Etulu connected through GUILT

- 1) Dom's for abandoning Claire / abortion of his guild
- 2) Etulu's for killing a man

BOTH have blood on their hands. One literally. One figuratively.

cf: carving @ AGO—Inuk brandishing a knife at a polar bear

B) McArdle

- school's music teacher
- Dom is suspicious of his intents

(when he went to look at the piano when there was a "lesson", the piano was padlocked shut)

- possible pedophile
- damage done to Sam Willy?

C) Malachai

- Etulu's son
- dog killer
- drowns in kayak as Dom witnesses

(pp. 300-303 CLOSE READING)

Reading for Detail

QUIZ # 5 (pp. 253-303)

Each correct response is worth ½ mark.

/5 marks

Why does Snowball, the widowed lovebird, fly at the polar bearskin?

Why does Dom think he is “cracking up?”

What is the source of the “trail of red dots” that Dom thinks is blood on the snowy ground?

What is Arthur Parson’s nickname for Sam Willy?

Who is McCardle?

Who made the documentary “The Idea of North?”

Describe the figure Etulu is carving.

How did Etulu get the cross tattoo on his forehead?

Who did Etulu admit to killing?

With whom does Dom keep in touch by phone when he’s in Wolf Cove?

Wolf Cove
(pp. 303-349)

THE END OF THE NOVEL

Malachai's death

- a lesson for young Innu: *Don't go on the cold water in a kayak with a balaclava on your head.* (305)
- not that he was drunk; not that he was alone; not that the water was rough
- Dom is the final witness to his life
- audiotape of silence
- his last breath: *a song beneath the ice* (307)

Mystery

1) McArdle has disappeared: *who knows where the shifty bastard is* (309)

2) someone broke into the school and went at the piano with a hammer
As if a piano ever hurt anybody (309)

3) school principal is discreet about Etulu (sculpture of a life size hunter poised with harpoon): *He made this before he went away to Yellowknife* (311) –to prison

Parsons tells Dom to tune the school's piano. He calls Frank Mazur in Toronto for support and discloses that he's on Baffin Island.

4) *One string stayed dead.* (319)

PHOTO of a young Malachai naked with McArdle.

Dom wonders if Malachai's death was a suicide and how McArdle disappeared.

pp. 322-323 Note description of seal skinning contest: visceral.

IDEA OF NORTH

- real
- in the tobacco sweat of men and yeasty sweat of women
- in bad breath
- in sealskin
- farts
- milk dripping
- ammonia urine of babies

Wolf Cove Days School Concert

- Geela refuses to play: *I'm sorry. I can't. I can't play this.* (328)
- Dom plays because he understands: *She was then as I had been.* (328)
- THE SONG BENEATH THE ICE for Dom is Scriabin's Sonata no. 5, op 53:
Cold oily chords, the spray of the silver-tipped notes, the refraction of white light on water, until there was nothing but the calmness of the water and the wet slow spreading of the river pouring into the bay. (328)

**** Dom's synesthesia is returning.****

Re-read Joe's interpretation of what Dom plays (330):

...as the music thickens and grows more complex...he is making a music of all he has seen: The furious taxis slipping over the curve of the ring road and the howling of dogs at night;....announcing the end of the day and the burial of the dead and the closing of the great gates of the city for the night.

- post concert: Dom discovers Etulu smashing the piano and Etulu shouts, *You can't stop me, kabloona. Help me.* (332)

SYNESTHESIA: *notes poured from the frame of the little piano like blood rushing out of an open vein* (332)

Dom's hands feel as if they are on fire and he tries to extinguish the heat in a puddle of water outside.

What Dom played:

*... the continuation of what I have been thinking and what I have been hearing—the basis for all music surrounds us. **Thorn of Idea: Idea of North*** (334)

SECRET

- Geela takes Dom to a special island where she shows him the buried dead in a stone cairn
- a) hundreds of years old: *wizened corpse in a skin parka*
- b) likely McArdle: *collar of a blue ski jacket, the glint of a zipper*

THEME: healing: *Things heal slowly in the North.* (344)

- destruction of piano, not an act of criticism: *an act of cleansing committed by an old man with a broken heart*
- *Music neither soothes nor heals—it simply is, and then it disappears* (346)
- *the real story is this: I was the last man to play that piano* (348)

Singer has had a stroke and lost the use of his right arm. Dom sends Buddy a composition for the left hand: "An Idea of North"

Reading for Detail

QUIZ # 6 (pp. 303-349)

Each correct response is worth ½ mark.

/5 marks

How does Malachai die?

Who was the last person to see him alive?

What does Dom discover when he tunes the school's piano for the concert?

Why does Dom play the piano again?

What is the "prize" piece of seal from the carving contest that the pregnant woman eats?

Where does the title of the novel come from?

To what does the question "are there other boys and other photos" refer?

What does Dom find Etulu doing that is destructive?

What secret does Geela share with Dom?

What news does Joe have about Maisela Singer at the end of the novel?

CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

You are going to write a letter from Joe Serafino to Dominic Amoruso in which you communicate your anxiety about his well-being in addition to providing information about your progress through his tapes and notebooks. Be sure to ask him questions of clarification.

The letter should be about 500 words.

EVALUATION RUBRIC

KNOWLEDGE

How adequate is the information provided in relation to the facts presented in the novel?

1 2 3 4 5

How accurate is this information?

1 2 3 4 5

APPLICATION

How much are Joe's feelings and reactions as expressed in the letter "in character" with what we know of him?

a) to himself

0 1 2 3

b) to Claire or Margie or Carol

0 1 2 3

c) to Dominic

0 1 2 3

THINKING

Imaginative additions to the novel's presentation?

1 2 3 4 5

COMMUNICATION

Proper Letter format (date and address included)

0 1 2 3

Grammatical Accuracy

0 1 2 3

/30 marks

Building a Digital Pop-Culture Exhibit

Your group of three or four will create a thematic online museum exhibit based on Pop-Culture references in Joe Fiorito's *The Song Beneath the Ice*. Your museum will exhibit 10 – 12 thematically linked artefacts gleaned from the book.

Your group's **exhibit** should include:

- Public access to a digital display platform.
- A general introduction to the exhibit (200 – 300 words).
- 10 – 12 thematically linked artefact displays. Themes include: food, beverages, music, film, clothes, sports, television, radio, advertising, etc.
- Any additional links to pages you found useful, as well as other pop-culture sites of interest.

Each group will include **two or three curators** and one **technology coordinator (TC)**.

The curators will be responsible for writing the introduction and creating the individual displays, which include gathering audio and visual resources. As a curator your displays should include:

- One or two pictures of the artefact. You may also include short videos.
- An audio component, particularly if your category is radio or music.
- A textual description of the artefact, its time and place of use and any other historical notes.
- In what context it appears in the book. (Provide a sentence-long description as well as a page number and quotation where appropriate)
- The name of the curator that created the display.

The TC will manage the digital display platform. As a TC your responsibilities will include:

- Set-up the basic platform and teach your group how to use it well enough to post their displays.
- Creating the links page
- Resolve group technical issues
- Organizing and keeping the group's usernames and passwords.
- Writing a 300 – 500 word review on the platform employed (Was it a useful platform through which to create an online museum? Were any significant difficulties encountered? What would you change?)

Work may be redistributed if the group agrees. For example, one of the curators might create the links page, etc. Although a group effort, you will be marked for your individual contributions.

Resources:

Platforms*:

<http://sites.google.com/>
<http://voicethread.com/>
<http://show.zoho.com>
<http://www.piczo.com>
<http://www.yola.com/>

Pictures, Video and Sound:

A great copyright "safe" site for gathering film, pictures, sound, etc:
www.creativecommons.org

