The Poisoned Pool by Rob Lacey

Back, way back, before the pig's tail was curled
The Great Artist and his Son painted the world.
They started with the sky, which they soaked in blue
Then they coloured in the sun, 'til it was yellow right through.
They painted the grass a gorgeous green.
And the mud was the deepest brown you've ever seen.
But the flowers and the animals were even more fine:
Every single one got its own design.
Stripes and shades and dots and dapples,
Purples, reds, greens - and that's just the apples.
The lions got gold, the flamingos got pink,
The goldfish got orange, and blue water to drink.
The canary got yellow, the blue tit - blue
The polar bear white and most sheep too.
The chameleon got given full freedom to play
And the big old elephant was happy with grey.

(Chorus)
They splashed out with the richest rainbow:
Painting indigo for some get up and go.
They drew red for the helpless, yellow for the hopeless
Blue for the worried, green for the weary.
Violet for the lonely, orange for the sad.
The full spectrum soared and made people glad
Father and Son, plus Helper made one
With so much colour; so much fun,
So many shades and so many sheens,
They brought so much beauty to so many scenes.

But under the ground there was a poisoned pool
Which waited dark and still, until,
It soaked and seeped, it crept and crepted
It's dark way up up up into the ground.
And the grey took away the brown of the earth
and the green of the grass.
And the animals that ate it by the very next day
Found that their colour had faded away.
Soon the poisoned pool
Had turned the whole world grey.
But the Great Artist waited
'Til it was the right time to say,
"Son, now is the time to go on the attack
Please go to the earth and bring the colour back."

So the Son came.
He seemed the same as any baby boy
But as he grew he soon knew, as he painted and drew,
And as the colours came through,
That his pictures blew the grey away
From peoples' tired eyes.
(chorus) He splashed out with the richest rainbow:
Painting indigo for some get up and go.
He drew red for the helpless, yellow for the hopeless
Blue for the worried, green for the weary.
Violet for the lonely, orange for the sad.
The full spectrum soared and made people glad.
The Son of the Father, plus Helper made one
With so much colour; so much fun,
So many shades and so many sheens,
He brought so much beauty to so many scenes.

He put colour on their faces and colour in their bones.
But the full pallet of paints –
With their tantalising textures; with their tempting tones,
Brought out of the woodwork the government crones.
And soon they let him know that they ran the show.
That their kingdom of duller, with its concrete and dust,
Would conquer his kingdom of colour.

They found him and bound him and beat him.
He took it.
And from his look it seemed he knew
The man on the end of each fist that flew.
“I’m calling you to do away with a world of just grey.”
But the government crones, with bitter bones barked:
“We’ll just do away with you - today.”
They took him to the caves.
Made him brave the tunnels and turns
As they pushed and prodded him down down down
Through the dirt and the dark.
The lack of light hid each stalactite,
Which skagged and scraped,
As he crawled down down down to the poisoned pool
Which had robbed the world of its colour.

As he reached the beach the fumes from the pool
Tore tears from his eyes
And he turned and realised
They’d collapsed the tunnel and returned
Leaving him alone in the cavern to face a grave
In a cave of colourless, cancerous, stench,
And a still and sinister sea.
He knew this was how it had to be.
He began to drink.
He kneeled to sip,
To rip each lip roar with the waste of the world.
To taste with his tongue
The pool that had wrung the colour from the land,
And left it grey and bland.
He drank.
He drank the ocean dry
Until it wasn’t just diminished,
But finished.
He let out the cry:
“Now, let the colour return:
Let the grass grow green. Let the barley glow gold
Let the colours gleam. Like it was of old.”
Then he died.
Alone and cold.

But three days later…
The crumbled tunnel began to move
And the Son returned to the sun
And saw the colours that gleamed.
And he and his Father and the Helper beamed
At all they knew had begun.
They saw how now, like never before,
The artist in all could paint every dull wall.
Returning their towns, re-sighting their cities
To the beauty the Great Artist loved to recall.

(chorus) They splashed out with the richest rainbow:
Painting indigo for some get up and go.
They drew red for the helpless, yellow for the hopeless.
Blue for the worried, green for the weary.
Violet for the lonely, orange for the sad.
The full spectrum soared and made people glad.
The children of the Father, had at last become
People of colour; people of fun,
So many shades and so many sheens,
They brought so much beauty to so many scenes.

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NATRE would like to thank Sandra Lacey and Lacey Theatre Company for permission to use this poem-story in the 2012 Art in Heaven competition, and for their co-operation in setting the theme for art work.
Three suggestions for classroom RE to introduce the Poisoned Pool.

1. **Perform.** This is a performance piece. It would be great to get some older pupils to create performance – Year 6 could do this for younger primary children, or a GCSE drama class to perform for a Year 7 assembly. It’s worth thinking about whether many voices taking a line each will work better than one voice for each verse. Is there a movement sequence or dance that can go with the performance?

2. **Symbolism and Connection.** The Poisoned Pool is rich in symbolism, and deeply connected to the narrative of the crucifixion. After hearing the poem, pupils might read John chapter 19. Can they list all the connections between the two stories? What has the writer Rob Lacey used from the Bible? What has he added to the Bible?

3. **Questions, Questions.** If you ask groups of three or four to raise all the questions they can about the poem, a good way to do it is to give them a copy with very wide margins to scribble their questions down. Get groups to share and develop the best possible questions about the poem, and then discuss answers to them as a class.

One or more of these three pieces of work might be the basis for the class to plan their entries to Art in Heaven, in which they illustrate one moment from the story. It is probably good to ask pupils to choose all different parts of the story to do their art work. A class book, showing 30 moments, might be a great group entry to the competition. Does anyone want to make a digital video, dance or drama from this? Art in heaven judges will be interested.