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How to Make a Ghost Town

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Rig federal laws
and let companies lease native land
to carve an underworld
beneath the tristate area,
a 40-square-mile labyrinth
lined with fool's gold.

Wait for the miners to leave
and man-made caverns to flood,
for wildlife to flee or die,
bleached-wood beaver dens
and swaths of fish belly-up,
for children to become ill
after sledding on piles of chat,
for babies to be born,
their blood thick with lead,
for the EPA to designate the region
as an official superfund site
on a National Priorities List.

Walk down the roads of Picher,
look into that sinkhole
behind the foreclosed high school,
talk with the few residents
who refused to accept
government money to move—
and before driving out of town,
drink Tar Creek's orange water
to let a little settle into you.

Discussion questions for poem *How to Make a Ghost Town*:

1. What policies and laws allowed this devastation to occur?
2. Why do you think the people who lived in the town did not protest the leasing of the land? If you had been working in that community, how would you have worked to try to get the people who lived there to organize against the leasing of the land by the companies?