

We are Seven

William Wordsworth

A. Lead – in:

There is something interesting in the way children see the world. They see things from a different perspective because of their simple nature. Read this poem to find out how an adult's understanding of death differs from that of a little child.

B. Let's listen to the poem:

1. First you listen to the poem as the teacher reads it aloud.
2. The teacher reads it aloud for the second time. Pay attention to each word and line of the poem as the teacher reads it. And then read the poem silently to understand the text better.

C. The Text:

———— A simple Child,
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?

I met a little cottage Girl:
She was eight years old, she said;
Her hair was thick with many a curl
That clustered round her head.

She had a rustic, woodland air,
And she was wildly clad:
Her eyes were fair, and very fair;
- Her beauty made me glad.

"Sisters and brothers, little Maid,
How many may you be?"
"How many? Seven in all," she said,
And wondering looked at me.

"And where are they? I pray you tell."
She answered, "Seven are we;
And two of us at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea.

"Two of us in the church-yard lie,
My sister and my brother;
And, in the church-yard cottage, I
Dwell near them with my mother."

"You say that two at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea,
Yet ye are seven! I pray you tell,
Sweet Maid, how this may be."

Then did the little Maid reply,
“Seven boys and girls are we;
Two of us in the church-yard lie,
Beneath the church-yard tree.”

“You run about, my little Maid,
Your limbs they are alive;
If two are in the church-yard laid,
Then ye are only five.”

“Their graves are green, they may be seen,”
The little Maid replied,
“Twelve steps or more from my mother’s door,
And they are side by side.

“My stockings there I often knit,
My kerchief there I hem;
And there upon the ground I sit,
And sing a song to them.

“And often after sun-set, Sir,
When it is light and fair,
I take my little porringer,
And eat my supper there.

“The first that dies was sister Jane;
In bed she moaning lay,
Till God released her of her pain;
And then she went away.

“So in the church-yard she was laid;
And, when the grass was dry,
Together round her grave we played,
My brother John and I.

“And when the ground was white with snow,
And I could run and slide,
My brother John was forced to go,
And he lies by her side.”

“How many are you, then,” said I,
“If they two are in heaven?”
Quick was the little Maid’s reply,
“O Master! we are seven.”

“But they are dead; those two are dead !
Their spirits are in heaven!”
’Twas throwing words away; for still
The little Maid would have her will,
And said, “Nay, we are seven!”

D. About the Poet:

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was one of the greatest poets of the country and of natural life. He regards nature as a great teacher and his poems seek to establish an intimate relationship with it. He also depicts simple rustic life in a number of poems. He is the author of several memorable lyrics such as “Daffodils”, “The Solitary Reaper” and “Lucy Poems”.

E. About the Poem:

This poem was inspired by the poet’s meeting a child near Goodrich Castle in Wales in 1793. The poem begins with an enchanting image of childhood which is marked by simplicity – a life free from tension, full of spirit and vigour and unclouded by the knowledge of death. The poet meets an eight-year-old charming rustic girl and enquires about her family. She replies that she lives with her mother and they are seven brothers and sisters out of whom two are in the grave. The poet gets puzzled and insists that they are only five brothers and sisters since two of them are already dead and buried. But the girl says that their graves are close to her home. She emphasises her association with the two dead brothers and sisters, telling the poet that she often knits her stockings and hems kerchiefs by their graves and sitting there sings a song to them and also takes her supper there. The poem ends with the child’s moving and innocent statement that they are seven brothers and sisters.

F. Notes and Glossary:

cottage	:	usually a small, modest house of one storey ; a country residence
clustered	:	a number of things of the same kind growing or joined together
rustic	:	rural
woodland	:	pertaining to the woods
air	:	the apparent character assumed by a person, character, situation, etc
wildly	:	in a disorderly manner ; carelessly

clad	:	clothed ; covered ; dressed
fair	:	beautiful ; pretty
maid	:	a girl
wonder	:	to express surprise, amazement
dwell	:	live ; inhabit ; reside
church-yard	:	a burial ground adjoining a church
stockings	:	close-fitting coverings, usually knitted for foot and part of the leg
knit	:	to interweave with needles
kerchief	:	a cloth worn by women as a head-covering or scarf
hem	:	to fold back and sew down the edges of cloth, garment, etc.
porringer	:	a small dish for soup, porridge, etc.
moaning	:	uttering a prolonged, low and inarticulate sound expressing physical or mental suffering
released	:	relieved ; set free
slide	:	to pass along smoothly
spirits	:	souls

G. Let's understand the poem:

1. What notable features of a simple child does the poet describe in the first stanza?
2. What does the poet write about the habitation and the appearance of the girl?
3. How does the poet start the conversation with the girl and what does the girl say in reply?
4. What answer does the girl give to the poet relating to her brothers, sisters and mother?
5. Why does the answer given by the girl puzzle the poet ?
6. What arguments does the girl put forth to prove that her two dead brothers and sisters have not been separated from her ?

7. How does her sister suffer before her death ?
8. How does God release Jane from her suffering ?
9. What did she and her brother use to do round her sister's grave when the grass was dry ?
10. At what time of the year did John die ?
11. How does the poem end ?

H. Let's appreciate the poem:

- (a)
 1. What does the second line of the first stanza: "that lightly draws its breath" suggest?
 2. Explain the meaning of the third line of the first stanza: "And feels its life in every limb"
 3. What does the poet write about a child's knowledge of death?
 4. Describe the surroundings in which the poet finds the girl.
 5. Why does the girl look "wondering" at the poet after answering his questions about her family?
 6. What does the line, "Their graves are green.", imply ?
 7. How is the time after sunset described by the poet ?
 8. What does the line "And when the ground was white with snow", suggest ?
 9. What does the expression, "Twas throwing words away." mean ?

(b) Group activity :

The teacher divides the class into eight groups. The rhyming words of the first stanza are explained to the learners. Each group is asked to take two stanzas and find out the rhyming words. Each group presents its findings in the class.

I. Let's listen and speak :

All the eight groups (or as the case may be) are asked to prepare dialogues on the theme of the poem. Some sample dialogues may be provided. Each group presents the prepared dialogue playing the role of the girl child and the poet. All the groups listen and interact.

(This may be used as a competitive game awarding credit for the quality of dialogue and presentation).

Poet : Hello girl, how many sisters and brothers do you have ?

Girl : We are seven in all.

Poet : Where are they ?

Girl : Two of my brothers live at Conway.

Poet : What about the others ?

Girl : Two of my brothers have gone to sea.

Poet : And the rest ?

Each group is asked to prepare dialogues in their own way on the theme of the poem and enact them in the class.

J. Let's write:

1. "We are Seven"? Describe who the seven are. What are their names ? Where are they ?
2. Write a note on the feelings and ideas of the child and the adult described in the poem and give your own comments on them.

