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LYRIC POETRY. LITERATURE CURRICULUM III, REVISED TEACHER AND STUDENT VERSIONS.

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REPORT NUMBER CRF-H-149-63

REPORT NUMBER BR-5-0366-63

CONTRACT OEC-5-10-319

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.25 HC-\$2.16 52P.

DESCRIPTORS- \*CURRICULUM GUIDES, \*ENGLISH CURRICULUM, \*ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, \*POETRY, CURRICULUM RESEARCH, GRADE 9, INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS, LITERARY ANALYSIS, SECONDARY EDUCATION, STUDY GUIDES, SYMBOLS (LITERARY), FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE, TEACHING GUIDES, LITERARY GENRES, OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER, EUGENE, PROJECT ENGLISH.

THROUGH A CLOSE LOOK AT 18 SELECTED LYRIC POEMS, THIS TWO-PART NINTH-GRADE UNIT DISTINGUISHES THE LYRIC FROM OTHER KINDS OF POETRY. PART 1 DEALS WITH THE TECHNICAL DEVICES OF POETIC LANGUAGE, THE POET'S PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON HIS EXPERIENCES, AND THE DIFFERENT TONES, ATTITUDES, AND SUBJECTS SEEN IN THE POEMS OF DICKINSON, FROST, KEATS, HOUSMAN, AND OTHERS. PART 2 CONSIDERS DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF A COMMON THEME--THE JOURNEY--AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR SUCH POETS AS YEATS, LONGFELLOW, POE, AND MASEFIELD. EACH PART INCLUDES SOME OF THE POEMS, EXPLICATIONS OF EACH OF THE POEMS, STUDY QUESTIONS, COMPOSITION ASSIGNMENTS, AND TEACHING SUGGESTIONS. A TEST DESIGNED TO ACCOMPANY THE UNIT, "INTRODUCTION TO LYRIC POETRY," IS APPENDED. SEE ALSO ED 010 129 THROUGH ED 010 160, ED 010 803 THROUGH ED 010 832, TE 000 195 THROUGH TE 000 220, AND TE 000 227 THROUGH TE 000 249.  
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LYRIC POETRY

Literature Curriculum III

Teacher Version.

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The project reported herein was supported through the Cooperative  
Research Program of the Office of Education, U. S. Department of  
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## LYRIC POETRY: PART ONE

### Introduction

It is impossible to define the term lyric with any kind of precision. One of the oldest types of literature known to man, occurring in every literature of the world, its meaning has changed according to place and time and people. Furthermore, the lyric is probably the most generally inclusive of all types of verse: a serenade is a lyric, and so is the epithalamium; a sonnet can be a lyrical poem as well as a narrative one; an ode can be a lyric, and so can the elegy, the hymn, the song, the complaint, the carol. However, in spite of such broad characteristics, the lyric can still be defined, or at least described, with sufficient clarity and precision to permit students on this level to distinguish between lyrical poetry and other kinds.

The lyric was originally a song, intended to be sung to the accompaniment of a lyre, the stringed instrument of ancient Greece, which might best be described as a sort of small, portable harp. From the earliest age of English literature through the 17th century, the lyric as song enjoyed continuous and widespread popularity; the succeeding ages, however, saw a gradual but definite distinction made between the lyric as song and the lyric as poem meant only to be read. But the musical characteristics of lyrics are very much in evidence in all ages, and one can cite lyrics of the last two centuries which have become popular at least in part because of their having been set to music: Thomas Moore's "Believe me, if all those endearing young charms," William Cory's "Eton Boating Song," Robert Burns's "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton," and, of course, numerous devotional lyrics.

In spite of the difficulty of defining lyric, definitions abound. Here is the core of a few of them, taken from various handbooks of literature:

- "A brief subjective poem strongly marked by imagination, melody, and emotion, and creating for the reader a single, unified impression."
- "Poetry intended to express the personal emotions or thoughts of the poet or one imaginary speaker. . . . Distinguishing qualities seem to be subjectivity and high emotion."
- "A short poem having as its single subject the personal feelings of the poet."
- "A short poem neither narrative, dramatic, nor didactic. . . . has as its subject the poet's personal feelings (real or imagined)."

The lyric poems in the first part of this unit have been chosen for several reasons: first, most of them are highly subjective poems, expressions of the poet's essential, most personal, and deepest feelings; furthermore, although not all of them will meet all the criteria of the definitions listed above, they are all, quite obviously, lyrical poems; and finally, although none of these poems is difficult, each is of sufficient intellectual density to force the student to bring into action all his critical faculties.

The teacher should not feel compelled to deal with all the poems in this unit. There is sufficient variety here to permit the teacher to deal with whatever poems he desires, at whatever pace he feels is correct.

Robert Frost: "Dust of Snow"

**EXPLICATION:**

This brilliant, one-sentence poem is a perfect starting point for a study of lyric poetry: it is completely subjective, concerned only with the narrator; and it is concerned only with the narrator's emotions and thoughts.

Structurally, there are three points in time concerned here: the first part of the narrator's day; the incident of the crow's shaking snow on him; and the second part of the narrator's day. The crow's action is both the "balancing point" between the two parts of the day and the event which has caused the narrator's thankfulness.

Emotionally, the poem is concerned with a change of mood. The narrator "had rued" the day, had felt sorrow; we are not told why he felt as he did, but the reason is not important. Then--the crow, a common bird which has for us a variety of associations: it is a raucous, "friendly" sort of bird which makes us think almost automatically of rural life in its common, everyday aspects. But, on the other hand, the crow is also a black bird, the sort of bird which has for centuries been associated with bad omens, evil, and death. Perhaps both aspects of the bird are suggested here in the before-and-after contrast of the narrator's day.

What we had earlier called the "balancing point" of the poem is a bit unusual in that it concerns how a bird's action affects a man. And herein lies the key to the work: a man feels badly, a bird accidentally shakes snow on him, and as a consequence the man's mood changes completely. Bird and nature conspire, so to speak, to effect a change in man.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. Discuss the development of this poem.
2. Why do you think Frost has used a crow, instead of, for example, a hawk or a robin?
3. Why has Frost used the expression "dust of snow" instead of simply "snow"?
4. Although this poem can also be called a narrative poem (i. e., one which tells a story), why it is more precise to call it a lyric?

William Shakespeare: "Winter"

**EXPLICATION:**

Shakespeare's "Winter," like Tennyson's "The Eagle" and Dickinson's

"The Snake" which follow, demonstrates the ability of the poet to convey a vivid impression of his subject without ever directly stating what that impression is. By presenting selective, concrete images in terms rich with connotative power ("Dick the shepherd blows his nail," "milk comes frozen home in pail," "birds sit brooding in the snow," "Marian's nose looks red and raw"), he invites the reader to participate in his own experience of winter. The images are not merely visual; the tactile and auditory senses are often evoked, and suggestions of taste ("roasted crabs") and smell ("While greasy Joan doth keel the pot") are also suggested. Virtually every detail in the poem may be examined for its suggestive quality. It is important to observe that the words "cold" and "unpleasant" do not appear in the poem.

The speaker of the poem gives no indication of his identity, which is unimportant as he reveals no definite attitude about winter. Whereas another might view winter as a "dead" season or as a time of extreme discomfort, Shakespeare simply presents his subject to us--he offers no "judgment" about it. He does, however, indicate a contrast in the poem: each stanza ends with a refrain which sums up the experience of winter as a contrast between the bitter cold of the outdoors and the cozy warmth inside. Although the extreme temperature might be unpleasant, the song of the "staring owl" is a "merry note" when heard from inside the house "While greasy Joan doth keel the pot."

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Draw up a list of all the details in "Winter" showing which of the five senses each detail appeals to.
2. Use your dictionary to find out the meaning of the expression "the parson's saw." There is a logical meaning, and also a humorous one.-- The word "saw" denotes a "wise saying," but a pun is apparent, suggesting the drone of his voice.
3. How has the poet so sharply conveyed the sensation of cold without using the word "cold" itself?--This question should lead students to consider the poetic advantages of imagery as opposed to abstract statement. They can learn that images enable the reader to share in the experience rather than simply hear about it.
4. In verse or prose, describe one of the other seasons. Use details and images that convey your specific impression of the season, but do not state what your main impression is--let your details do it for you.

Emily Dickinson: "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass"

#### EXPLICATION:

The experience in which Emily Dickinson invites her readers to participate is decidedly more emotional and personal than that offered by either

"Winter" or "The Eagle." Like Shakespeare and Tennyson, she presents a vivid description of her subject through carefully selected images; however, whereas Tennyson permits the reader to observe the eagle and Shakespeare allows him to sense the qualities of winter, Dickinson causes the reader to react to the snake.

Perhaps the best way to approach this poem is to examine the diction, phrasing, and imagery for their suggestive effects. Subtlety pervades the first four stanzas; the subject is never labeled for the reader, but a series of images focusing upon various aspects of the subject contributes to a total impression of the snake. The first line, for instance, does not identify the subject; it is not until movement is suggested that we begin to suspect the "fellow"'s identity. The use of "rides" rather than "moves" or "slithers" appropriately captures the graceful movement of the snake without making its identity obvious. The last line of stanza 1, "His notice sudden is," repeats the notion of interrupted movement implied earlier by the word "occasionally"; and the inversion of verb and complement does more than simply fit phrase to meter--the displacement, which surprises the reader, emphasizes the suddenness of his appearance. The second stanza continues the notion of an elusive character whose appearance is sudden and occasional. The grass, not the snake, dominates the image here--it divides, closes, and opens again, revealing the snake which is described merely as "a spotted shaft."

Coldness and dampness, qualities usually associated with snakes, are presented indirectly in stanza 3: "He likes a boggy acre, / A floor too cool for corn." No reference is made here to the actual body of the snake, but the terse description of his preferred habitat produces the necessary association. The "surprise motif" which dominates stanzas 1 and 2 continues in 3 and 4: he often appears under the morning sun, warming himself, yet he is unexpected--he seems to "belong" in cold, damp places; thus he is repeatedly mistaken for something else. The use of "wrinkled" at the end of stanza 4 captures in a word the sudden, elusive quality of the snake's appearance and movement.

The first four stanzas present a relatively objective view of the subject in comparison to the concluding stanzas, which reveal the feeling of the speaker toward the subject. Although other creatures are regarded with a "transport of cordiality," the appearance of the snake always evokes an intense reaction--"A tighter breathing, / And zero at the bone." The speaker's reaction seems to be instinctive more than rational or emotional--the age-old fear that mankind seems always to have had of snakes; and this is quite aside from the fact that the snake of this poem is apparently a harmless garter snake.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is the subject of the poem? (Although this question appears all too obvious, a surprising number of students will deduce from the first and last lines that the subject is a dead man in a field.)
2. The poem may be divided into two parts. Where would you draw the line? Why?--The first four stanzas describe the habits of the snake; the last two present the poet's reaction to it.

3. Which verbs in the poem convey movement? In what way are they effective verbs for the subject of the poem?--Students should notice "rides" and "wrinkled," which suggest the rather mysterious movement peculiar to snakes. They should also notice "divides," "closes," and "opens," which actually refer to the grass but imply the movement of the snake.
4. What other words, besides the verbs, suggest movement? Can you identify the simile and the metaphor?--This question should lead students to see that the words and images in the poem have been carefully chosen to contribute to the total effect. "Notice" and "sudden" connote movement, as do the phrases "as with a comb" and "a whip lash in the sun," which the student should be able to identify as simile and metaphor.
5. Why does the poet alter the position of the last two words in stanza 1? Does this shift in any way contribute to the idea expressed in that line?--See explication.
6. What is your attention mainly drawn to in stanza 2? Why?
7. In stanza 3, what two "snakelike qualities" are suggested?
8. What is meant by the phrase "a transport of cordiality?" How would you explain, in other terms, the poet's attitude toward most of "nature's people?"
9. What is the poet's feeling toward the "narrow fellow in the grass?" Which phrase or phrases most directly convey(s) this feeling? Is there anything in the first four stanzas to support that feeling?--See explication.
10. Look back over the poem and count the times that the snake actually "appears" in the poem. If you actually "experienced" the snake, as most readers do while reading this poem, how do you account for that fact?--Students should see that the details have been selected to convey the experience of encountering a snake, not merely to tell what a snake looks like and how it functions. The elusive quality of the snake is realistically imitated by the way it slips in and out of the poem.

Alfred Tennyson: "The Eagle"

#### EXPLICATION:

The first stanza presents an image of a motionless eagle poised high on a crag above the rest of the world. To this point, the details could be enclosed within a frame with the eagle, standing "ringed with the azure world," as the focal point. The alliterative sequence of the hard "c" sound; the solitary, regal image of the eagle; and particularly the words "clasps" and "stands" suggest his latent power.

In the second stanza, however, two things happen which defy graphic representation. The point of view shifts from the observer to the eagle himself,

and the world below is, for a moment, the point of focus: "The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls." His keenness of vision is suggested in the fifth line as he scouts for his prey, and finally in the last line his power is released.

"The Eagle" seems to be an extremely objective poem. The author seems to reveal no sentiment toward his subject, and we might even be stretching things a bit to say that he expresses wonder at the sight of the bird. His description of the eagle is not of the type which we would find in the dictionary (which might be consulted for comparison), but it does take into account the qualities that most people associate with eagles: strength, speed, and sharp-sightedness. Why, then, is this lyric poetry? Because it enables the reader to experience the eagle as the poet experienced it; the poet has presented us with objective facts about the eagle, but we must remember that, beneath the objectivity, there is the poet who has experienced this bird. It is lyric poetry also because it presents the experience in terms of vivid and memorable imagery. And, finally, we can say that this is lyric poetry for a reason that we have not yet dealt with, but which should be taken into account in any discussion of lyric poetry: the poem means more than it says. The word "power," for instance, appears nowhere in the poem, yet the reader emerges with an unmistakable sensation of power. The phrase "his mountain walls" suggests fortification, and the personal pronoun gives the bird a mysterious human quality. One dictionary defines "eagle" as "any of various large diurnal birds of prey of the accipiter family noted for their strength, size, graceful figure, keenness of vision, and powers of flight." Tennyson has not bothered to define the bird, but his experience of it tells us so much more than any definition ever could.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Alliteration is the repetition, in successive or nearly-successive words, of the same consonant sound at the beginning of words, or of syllables within words. Note the repetition of the hard "c" sound in line 1. What impression does this sound convey, and how does it "fit" the eagle?
2. Why does Tennyson use the word "wrinkled" to describe the sea? To what is he comparing the sea? As you probably know, this kind of comparison is called metaphor--a word usually associated with one kind of thing is applied to another without any direct expression of comparison or similarity between the two.--From above, the waves might appear like wrinkles, as in a piece of cloth or paper.
3. The kind of comparison found in line 6 is called a simile. How does it differ from a metaphor?
4. What qualities of the eagle does Tennyson suggest in his poem? What quality dominates our impression of the eagle?--See explication.

William Wordsworth: "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways"

EXPLICATION:

One of the most common themes dealt with in lyric poetry is love, as in this lyric of Wordsworth's. In spite of its essential simplicity, there are two problems which should be noted. First, "the springs of Dove" have never been positively identified. Wordsworth knew three rivers named Dove, but which one he was referring to here is not known. Second, the identity of Lucy has also never been ascertained; the poet could have been referring, under a fictitious name, to any one of several women who influenced his life; or Lucy could be entirely fictitious. A solution to these problems is, in any case, not essential to a clear understanding of the poem.

Not only is this a poem about love, but it is about isolation as well; Lucy lives near "the springs of Dove," that is, near the source of the river. Furthermore, the river arises in lonely country, where the ways are "untrodden." Nor is Lucy's isolation just physical, for there are "none to praise" her here, "And very few to love."

The second stanza emphasizes the idea of the first by two mutually clarifying metaphors: Lucy is like a half-hidden violet near a moss-covered stone. Note how "mossy" implies both stability (i. e., not moving) and age--both, here, aspects of isolation. The second metaphor (introduced by the dash) compares Lucy to a shining star, when that star is the only one in the sky. Both "violet" and "star" are words which have for us connotations of beauty and simplicity; the poet adds to them here the idea of isolation.

The first two lines of the third stanza are a last insistence on Lucy's isolation: "she lived unknown" and few could have known of her death. The last two lines of the poem give us the key point of the whole work; although Lucy has lived and died in isolation, for the speaker her death has made "the difference." These last two lines are a striking example of the power that poetry can achieve by understatement. The narrator does not tell us precisely how he was affected by Lucy's death, to what degree, with what results; simply "oh, / The difference to me!" The poet suggests, and leaves it to the reader to feel the full impact of the suggestion.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is the meaning of the phrase "springs of Dove"? Does it make any difference to your interpretation whether or not you know what "Dove" refers to?
2. Discuss the two figures of speech in the second stanza. How are they related to each other?
3. What are the two main themes of this poem?

4. It is not known whom Wordsworth was referring to in "Lucy." Does it make any difference? What if she were to be identified as a blonde, blue-eyed, eighteen-year-old farmer's daughter who lived in Wales? Or a slim, dark-haired, twenty-four-year-old shopkeeper's daughter in Ireland?

Leigh Hunt: "Jenny Kiss'd Me"

#### EXPLANATION:

This charming little poem seems to be simplicity itself, but, as is usually the case with good poetry, the simplicity is, paradoxically enough, the result of complexities of several kinds.

Jenny has kissed the narrator; we don't know why, but again, as in the Wordsworth poem, reasons why are not important. What do count are Lucy's nature and Jenny's act, and the results of both. Jenny's kiss is impulsive, spontaneous; the narrator has just met her (that is, in the sense of coming into her presence), and she has jumped up to kiss him. The rest of the poem is concerned with the narrator's reaction. First he addressed Time, not in the usual plaintive manner of people who feel the passing of time, but playfully, almost in a challenging manner, telling him to put his "sweet" (the kiss) into his list. His attitude is paradoxical, since what Time puts into its list is soon past, but he doesn't seem concerned about this.

The last four lines present a contrast: on the one hand, the effects of time: "weary," "sad," "old"; on the other hand, "Jenny kissed me," which makes up for all the rest, is worth all the rest. Again, as in the Wordsworth poem, we have a contrast between the themes of the passing of time and of love; but in Wordsworth, the passing of time has caused the cessation of love, whereas in Hunt time will have no effect on the narrator's reaction to the kiss.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Hunt tells us no more about Jenny than Wordsworth did about Lucy. Is it for the same purpose?
2. Are there any significant differences in the two poems as far as our lack of knowledge of the two women is concerned?

Robert Burns: "A Red, Red Rose"

#### EXPLANATION:

This simple love poem, one of the most famous in the language, begins in a very audacious manner. Note how close the line "O, my love is like a

red, red rose" is to the cliché "my love is like a rose"; however, the addition of the repeated adjective changes a cliché into a memorable line of poetry. There is another near-cliché in this first stanza, when Burns compares his love to a song, but the melodious phrase "sweetly played in tune" not only makes the figure uncommon but raises it to a high level of beauty.

The audacity of Burns's imagery is continued in the second stanza. He is as deeply in love as she is fair, and he will love her until the seas go dry-- both conventional figures. But the first one is saved from being ordinary both by the omission of the second "as" and by the grammatical inversion, and the second one is made uncommon by the poet's use of the Scots' dialect "gang" instead of "become" or "go."

This latter figure is repeated at the beginning of the next stanza, which also includes the "sands 'o life" cliché; but between the two, and giving considerable force to the stanza, he will love her till "the rocks melt wi' the sun!"

Throughout these figures of speech we can note a combination of, on the one hand, an intense, passionate love; and, on the other, a sort of male swaggering, or dominance. For example, in the last stanza the lover braggingly affirms that he has to say farewell for a while, but he will come to her again even though he has to travel ten thousand miles to do it. He is the typical male lover: passionate and protective, yet swaggering and boastful--and, perhaps above all, sincerely in love.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. A cliché can be defined as a set phrase which, through over-use, has become stale, has lost its original vividness (for example, white as snow, strong as a horse, green as grass). In this poem Burns has used several figures of speech which are very much like clichés, but yet are not--such as in line one. Find three or four of these, mentioning what the cliché is and how Burns has yet revised the clichés to produce strong, original figures of speech.
2. The speaker obviously loves the girl; but note also that he says he would walk ten thousand miles to see her if he had to. Discuss the speaker as both a lover and a braggart.
3. This poem is written in a simplified form of Burns's Scots' dialect. How do words like "lass," "luve," and "gang" affect the poem?

A. E. Housman: "When I Was One-and-Twenty."

#### EXPLICATION:

The dominant note of this poem is "rue" (line 14), regret, sorrow. The poem is about a young man who is growing up, and the business of growing up is inevitably attended by sorrows and disappointments.

At the age of twenty-one he is given advice by a wise man, to the effect that giving away his money is infinitely preferable to giving away his heart. "Keep your fancy free," he is told; but vigorous, impatient youth never has listened to its elders, so "No use to talk to me."

The wise man repeats his advice, but this time with a touch of paradox: one never gives away his heart in vain, because one pays for it "with sighs and tears" and "endless rue." But the young man, in the process of growing up, pays no attention to the advice and does give his heart away. The result is his mournful expression of regret: "'tis true, 'tis true."

Precisely why does the young man sorrow? Did his loved one turn against him? did she leave him for another? did she die? No answer is given, nor is any necessary. Housman has refused to specify the exact cause; he has left it up to the reader to think what he pleases. Hence, with a variety of answers possible, the reader can choose the one he feels applies most appropriately to the situation. Thus the poem will perhaps touch the reader more personally than it would if the poet had told us that the young man's love had died, or had run off with a business man.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is the dominant mood of this poem?
2. Discuss the contrast between the old man and the young man.
3. "This is a poem that deals with the sorrows of growing up." Discuss why this is or is not a fair statement.
4. Discuss the meaning of lines 11-14.
5. We know in a general way that the young man has had a disappointment in love. Why do you think Housman has not told us specifically what happened? Would it make any difference to know that, for example, the girl had accidentally drowned? Do you think that knowing something of this sort would make the poem better, or worse? --See Explication.

John Keats: "On the Grasshopper and the Cricket"

#### EXPLICATION:

One of the principal features of the Italian sonnet is the division of the poem into octave (the first eight lines) and sestet (the last six). The octave asks a question, or poses a problem, or expresses a doubt, or states a proposition; the sestet answers the question, or solves the problem, or calms the doubt, or applies the proposition. In Keats's poem the octave states a proposition: "The poetry of earth is never dead," with the rest of the octave explaining the proposition and applying it to the summer; and the sestet restates the proposition, in somewhat different terms, and applies it to winter.

The octave belongs to the grasshopper: when the hot sun has quieted all the birds and sent them to "hide in cooling trees," the grasshopper's voice is still heard, in spite of the heat, because "he has never done / With his delights." Note how Keats has achieved a strong contrast between hot and cool: on the one hand, the birds "are faint with the hot sun"; on the other hand, we have the "cooling trees," the freshness of the "new-mown mead," the grasshopper's resting beneath a "pleasant weed."

All these brief pictures of nature in summer go to make up "the poetry of earth," which is "never dead." In the sestet this latter phrase is changed to "is ceasing never," a more emphatic form, appropriate because "the poetry of earth" is less obvious in winter.

The sestet deals first with the cricket: in the cold, silent, winter evenings, its song is heard "from the stove" (it should be assumed here that the cricket is actually living in the house during the winter). But the cricket's song, although it is "in warmth increasing," is important not so much for itself, but rather for the associations it wakens: it seems "to one in drowsiness half lost / The Grasshopper's," and the grasshopper is remembered in relation to the "grassy hills" of summer. Hence we have come back to the starting point: the relation between grasshopper and summer.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. There is a strong dividing point in this poem. Determine this point, and then discuss how the two parts are both similar and unlike. --See Explication.
2. Is the emphasis of this poem more on the grasshopper or more on the cricket?
3. Why do you think the phrase "is never dead" (line 1) is changed to "is ceasing never" (line 9)? Are the two phrases interchangeable? --See Explication.
4. What does Keats mean by "the poetry of earth"? --See Explication.

Thomas Hood: "I Remember, I Remember"

#### EXPLICATION:

This is a poem of reminiscences, with most of the speaker's memories being happy ones. But this poem is not "happy," not optimistic; on the contrary, it is a poem of subdued grief, almost of despair. In the first stanza, for example, what the speaker remembers of the house where he was born is the "little window" through which he could see the sun "peeping in at morn." The sun never came too soon, nor did it ever bring a day that was too long; the sun was an element of nature that was welcomed. However, in the last two lines the poet wishes that he had died then, that "the night" had brought

him death. Not only is this death-wish a contrast to the joy which nature had brought him, but there is a further contrast in that he wishes he had died in the night--that is, when the sun is absent--whereas the sun had never brought him "too long a day," that is, a day which became night, or, metaphorically, joy which darkened into sadness. Similarly, in the second stanza, the flowers were "made of light," were the place where robins nested and where the speaker's brother "set/The laburnum on his birthday." In contrast, "The tree is living yet!"--as, by implication, his brother is not. In the third stanza he remembers where he used to swing, with the air rushing on him as it must do to swallows. He was happy--"My spirit flew in feathers then"--but now, the sadness which afflicts him--"the fever on my brow!"--could not be freshened by the pools of summer.

In the last stanza the sadness is related to the Divine. He remembers the childish belief he had that the tops of the fir trees "Were close against the sky." But realizing that this was merely "childish ignorance" does him no good, because now he knows "I'm farther off from heaven/Than when I was a boy."

This song the poet sings is an ages-old one: the passage from youthful innocence and joy to mature knowledge and sorrow. In this last poem of this section we find well exemplified the chief characteristics of the lyric: the poet is concerned with a personal emotion, something that has touched him deeply, and that has called his imagination into full play. It is as though the writer had bared his heart, not for public display, but simply because only in this manner could he most profoundly express himself.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is the speaker of this poem doing?--See Explication.
2. Of this poem's 32 lines, only eight or nine express the poet's sadness, and all the other lines treat of his joy. Keeping these figures in mind, do you feel that this is a predominantly happy poem or a sad one?
3. The speaker tells us, quite indirectly, that his brother is dead. How does he do this?--See Explication.
4. Why is the adult man "farther off from heaven" than when he was a boy?--See Explication.

## LYRIC POETRY: PART TWO

### Introduction

This unit is designed to make reading lyric poetry a pleasurable experience for ninth graders who at this point in their education are more familiar with narrative poetry. Here they will study a group of lyric poems which reveal different attitudes toward a common theme, the journey. It should be emphasized that, although the idea of the journey might at first seem to be more appropriate to narrative poetry, lyric poetry, with its probing into the heart of the poet, permits a view of the journey which is somewhat less concerned than narrative poetry with chronology and sequence of events, and more concerned with the interpretation and significance of the journey. It should also be noted that, in keeping with the curriculum for all grade nine literature, the emphasis will be on subject, rather than on form or point of view.

Each poem in this unit has been explicated and provided with student questions arranged to identify certain aspects of Subject, Form, and Point of View. Emily Dickinson's "There Is No Frigate Like a Book" and Keats's "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer" are vicarious journeys demonstrating the joy one experiences in imaginary travel through books. "Sea Fever" and "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" concern wishful journeys of the past and future. Poe's "Eldorado" and Longfellow's "Ultima Thule" present man's life as a journey, with its attendant sorrow and disappointment. "Nearing the Snow-Line" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" treat of the deep effect a voyage into nature can have on man.

Emily Dickinson: "There Is no Frigate like a Book!"

### EXPLICATION:

This poem, besides being an excellent introduction to lyric poetry on the journey theme, is also valuable as a model of how poets use the connotative associations of words. In addition to their denotative meaning, many words have overtones, or are suggestive of, meanings which go beyond mere definition, meanings which have become associated with such words through the way, or according to the circumstances, in which they have been used in the past. Stallion, for example, is defined as a male horse. But from our readings in romantic literature, we attach other qualities to this word: strength, virility, freedom, wildness, and so on.

The theme of this poem--that anyone may quickly and at very little cost take a vicarious journey simply through reading--is developed through four brief but convincing images, all of which are centered on the connotative associations of a few words. First, a book is very much like a "frigate." The poet has deliberately not used the general word ship nor has she used any other specific word such as brigantine, steamer, or liner. These words all have their own connotations, none of which are exactly like those we

associate with frigate. This word makes us think of romantic adventures on the high seas, speed, excitement.

Secondly, the word "coursers," little used in our own time, takes us back to the time of warfare on horseback; it connotes speed, gallantry, heroic battles. Then, "traverse," usually a verb, is here used as a noun; we associate it with difficult journeys, with rugged climbs of mountaineers across steep cliffs. Finally, "chariot," which brings to mind the warfaring Romans, their thundering chariot races, their glory, their pageantry.

In addition to the suggestive richness of connotations, the unusual sentence structure further enhances this poem. Note, for example, "To take us lands away," in which the noun "lands" is here used as an adverb; the phrase "Of prancing poetry," with "prancing" referring to and further developing the "coursers" of the previous line; "traverse" and "oppress," both words being used grammatically in rare, and hence striking, fashion; and finally, "frugal," which tends to personify "chariot," giving it the human quality of conservatism: a book doesn't cost much, considering the distant places it can take a "human soul."

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. This poem is about a journey. Where does this journey take the traveler? How will he get to his destination?
2. Discuss the travel images the poet uses.
3. Is the word "frigate" appropriate to represent a book? Why or why not? Is "coursers" appropriate for poetry? Is it better than "horses" would be in this poem?
4. A poet is expected to be accurate. What do you think of the phrase "prancing poetry"?
5. How does the lack of punctuation in this poem affect the way it is read?

Robert Frost: "Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening"

#### EXPLICATION:

Consisting of only four quatrains of vivid description, this poem is deceptively simple. Frost had much more to relate than the mere account of a man pausing briefly to enjoy his neighbor's woods. What he had in mind, however, is buried deeply in the symbolic possibilities of the poem, thus making the selection a very provocative study. This lyric clearly demonstrates that a reader brings his own experience to poetry and comes away with an interpretation at least partially dependent upon this experience. Although readers will generally agree about the basic framework of thought in this poem, their interpretation of particular symbols will vary. On the other hand, the tone

of the poem is another matter. No subjective consideration is necessary. Clearly it expresses a nostalgia for the simple and the beautiful that must be left behind. How this tone is achieved can be understood only after a number of elements in the poem are examined.

In the first two quatrains Frost presents several clear, visual images. A New Englander stops to view his neighbor's woods. Precise words ("woods," "home," "village," "fill up with snow") reveal a simple, pleasing scene. The narrator does not explain why he stops. Rather, the author depends upon an old ballad trick of allowing the experience to speak for itself. Only after the account unfolds and comments are made about the horse does the reader infer a possible explanation for the narrator's stopping "Between the woods and frozen lake":

My horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year

The dumb animal, insensitive to beauty, questions the stop, thus providing a contrast needed to accent the narrator's sensitivity to natural beauty.

Stanza three continues to develop the basic scene primarily through auditory imagery. The clean shake of "harness bells," the soft sound of sweeping wind and "downy flake" are pleasurable interruptions of nature's silence. Thus far, the reader sees the narrator pausing momentarily to admire a lovely scene--nothing more. Frost frames this miniature portrait of a New England landscape by using a simple, four-stressed line (iambic tetrameter) and a closely contrived rhyme scheme. Notice how his rhyme unifies the three stanzas into a composite picture. The last word of line three in stanza one becomes the rhyme for stanza three; a a b a / b b c b / c c d c.

Frost could have ended this poem after stanza three, leaving it as a moving little lyric. Instead, he added a final stanza that suggests new possibilities. No longer do the first three stanzas remain on one level. Now, they take on symbolic significance. The first line of stanza four does more than sum up the earlier setting. Connotatively, "dark" implies further meaning, especially when these words are considered in context:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  
But I have promises to keep  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

The poem has become abstract. Each reader must reflect upon his own experience to visualize what promises in life must be kept, how far and where he must travel before he sleeps. Moving back through the poem, he must reconsider and attach symbolic interpretations to specific imagery: the horse, the wind, the snow, the darkness. The significance of sleep is generally accepted by most readers as representing something final--death, for example. The repetition of the final line and the rhyme scheme of stanza four (d d d d) emphasize this suggestion of finality.

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Where is the narrator and what is he doing?
2. Does he seem to be at home in his surroundings?
3. Why did he stop? Is this clearly stated in the poem?
4. Why might this horse think it queer to stop in this lonely but beautiful spot? What might the owner think about someone stopping in his woods? Does stanza one suggest personality differences of both men?
5. Notice the concrete imagery in stanzas one and two. What do they have in common? How do the concrete words in stanza three differ from those in stanzas one and two?
6. Determine the rhyme scheme of these three stanzas. In what way does it help shape the various images presented?
7. Could Robert Frost have ended his poem with the third stanza?
8. Read the complete poem. What would you say is the attitude of the narrator toward his subject?
9. Study the final stanza. Might the narrator be concerned with more than just the experience of enjoying a lovely natural scene? Notice all the long vowels in this stanza. What do they tend to do to the line? Why is the last line repeated?
10. Now work back through the poem. Might the following words represent something beside their literal meaning: "woods," "dark," "downy flake," "house"?
11. What promises in life must one keep?
12. How do you interpret "asleep"?
13. How far must one travel before he sleeps?

John Masefield: "Sea Fever"

### EXPLICATION:

John Masefield's combination of music and meaning in "Sea Fever" captures the age-old yearning to sail the open seas. Three stanzas of moving imagery dramatize the narrator's longing to return to the ways of a sailor. Stanza one, abounding in concrete visual imagery--"lonely sea and sky," "tall ships," "and a star to steer her by," "white sails," "grey mist," "grey dawn breaking"--graphically suggests the initial point of the voyage. It captures the excitement and profound feeling of moving out to sea early, as the grey dawn breaks.

The second stanza concentrates on auditory images, as the speaker relates the sensations of racing across the high seas. The emphasis here is on sound, as the reader hears the "wild call" of the "running tide," the "flung spray" crashing across the bow and the call of sea gulls through the "blown spume." The speaker here is not actually on board ship; rather, what he is describing is what he vehemently desires. It is a deep yearning, a lyrical desiring, of the life he knows and wishes to return to. The voyage is only in the speaker's mind, but it is nonetheless a voyage.

The third stanza is slightly more abstract and reflective than the first two. The narrator recalls the pleasures of the vagabond life of the sailor, of travelling the route of the whales and sea gulls. He envisions good comradeship on board, "quiet sleep and a sweet dream" when he has completed his turn at the watch. This last line of the poem suggests the possibility of being understood on another level, particularly if "sleep" is defined as death.

The meter--seven stresses, in predominantly anapestic feet--produces the rollicking rhythm of a sea chanty. Each stanza consists of a single sentence and contains an a b b rhyme pattern, thus tending to keep the reader moving rapidly through the poem. Both these elements of form are appropriate for a subject so full of action. The feminine endings (lines 3 and 4, 7 and 8, 11 and 12) seem to connect one line to the next smoothly, producing an effect of continuous, smooth movement.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. In a few sentences, sum up what this poem is about.
2. What can you discover about the narrator? Is he young or old? Is he still sailing the seas? Is he relating a particular voyage? What phases of a sailor's life does he suggest in each stanza?
3. To what one of your senses does the imagery of the first stanza appeal? The second stanza? Which stanza presents the most general images? Why?
4. The last line of the poem suggests more than one meaning. For example, what additional meaning could you give to "sleep"?
5. Try to determine the two basic patterns of meter in this poem. Read the first line in a natural manner, and mark the accented and unaccented syllables. Then consider this reading:

      ∪ /    ∪ /    ∪ ∪ /    ∪ /    ∪ ∪ /    ∪ /    ∪ ∪ /  
      I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and the sky.

Notice the two types of feet: the iamb (∪ /) and the anapest (∪ ∪ /). Now see whether the remaining lines of the poem contain seven stresses to each line and a similar rhythm pattern. Why do you think John Masefield chose this rhythm for this particular poem?

William Butler Yeats: "The Lake Isle of Innisfree"

EXPLICATION:

Some journeys are traveled only in dreams. William Butler Yeats tells of such a journey in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." Spending much of his adult life in London and Paris and on the Italian Riviera, Yeats was never spiritually removed from his native Ireland. Frequently he returned, if only mentally, to the land of his youth. The poet himself tells how he was inspired to write "Innisfree." Walking down Fleet Street in London, he saw a small fountain in a shop window. A little ball balanced upon the fountain's jet; and the sound and the sight of water, coupled with the poet's yearning for home, caused him to remember Ireland's lake water, specifically Lough Gill in which was nestled the isle of Innisfree, the setting of many youthful dreams in which he envisioned himself living as Thoreau did on the banks of Walden Pond.

The content of the poem is clear. The poet determines to go to Innisfree and live a simple and peaceful life close to nature, removed from "roadways" and gray pavements. A yearning for simplicity seems the important factor rather than a specific island, although the impression is strong that crowded cities preclude the kind of simplicity and resulting peace the poet seeks. "In the deep heart's core" the song of the lake, really the song of peace, conquers the sound of the city.

Since sound is so important to poetry, the poet explores all its possibilities for communication. The central image in "Innisfree," the one which summons the poet, is the "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore." On the isle is the song of the cricket, the buzz of the honeybee and, perhaps, the rush of the linnet's wing. Yeats employs a variety of devices designed to make the sound appealing and complementary to the subject. Three six-stress lines (hexameter) with the mid-pause (caesura) followed by one four-stress line (tetrameter) provide a tidal movement, particularly with the use of end-stopped lines with an a b a b rhyme. Infrequent but effective use of alliteration ("a hive for the honeybee," "I hear lake water lapping with low sounds") contributes to the music. Simple language reinforces thought, for it is simplicity the poet seeks, aloneness in the "bee-loud glade." Use of metonymy helps achieve the desired simplicity of language. "Roadway" and "pavement gray" make even London seem unsophisticated.

The peace the poet looks for on his island is described in the second stanza, which is structurally slower, quieter, more peaceful than the first. This is achieved by such lines as "for peace comes dropping slow" in which the consonant sounds are difficult to pronounce without slowing down. The verbs in the second stanza are neither plentiful nor action-filled when compared with those in stanza one. Form and subject are sensitively blended.

Throughout the poem is a kind of sigh, a throbbing from the "deep heart's core," a pulsating like the lapping of the water; but there is a courageous, determined spirit that seems to dominate. "I will arise and go now" bespeaks a brave spirit unbent by disappointment and suggestive of another interpretation of the poem. If biographical material is introduced, the reader will realize that the dream of Innisfree did not become a reality. In this sense

the poem is more of a dedication to a value system than an account of the poet's desire to journey back to the land of his youthful dream. The mature poet sees beauty and peace in nature and in simplicity, but not in the artificiality of cities.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Innisfree is a little island located in Lough Gill (Lake Gill), one of Ireland's many lakes. As a boy, William Butler Yeats knew of this island. Now, as a mature poet, he is determined to return to Innisfree. What does he plan to do on the island?
2. Yeats depends heavily on sight and sound images to develop his thought. List all the things you see and hear as you read through the poem.
3. Besides telling the reader directly what kind of sounds are associated with his tale (the cricket singing, "the bee loud glade"), the poet uses other devices designed to develop musicality. You have already learned several of these devices in your study of poetry. Identify the figures of speech used in the following:
  - (a) "a hive for the honeybee."
  - (b) "I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;"
4. What is the rhyme scheme in each stanza?
5. What obvious punctuation difference do you see between the ending of line nine and all the other lines? What determines end punctuation? Ask your teacher to explain the terms "end-stopped" and "run-on"
6. How do the first, second, and third lines in each stanza compare in length with the fourth line? Answer this question by counting the stressed syllables. They will be easier to count if you consider the syllable before the mid-line comma to be unstressed.
7. Stanza two talks about the peace and rest the poet hopes to find on Innisfree. Read stanzas one and two aloud several times. See if you can sense the slower pace of stanza two. Can you see anything in the structure of the stanza that produces this slower pace?
8. To what do the "roadway" and the "pavement grey" refer? This may be easier to answer if you recall the kind of place to which the poet wishes to go. Obviously, "pavement grey" is only a part of this place which the poet wishes to leave. This is a figure of speech called metonymy. A dictionary will define this term for you.
9. The poet says that he will arise and go to Innisfree. Do you think that he is as much concerned with the place as he is with what he knows he will find there? Explain your answer.

Oliver Wendell Holmes: "Nearing the Snow-Line"

**EXPLICATION:**

There are, clearly, two levels of meaning in this poem. The first level concerns the speaker's physical journey. He has left the lower valley, the "misty vale," and is "slow toiling upward," leaving behind the "lingering sweetness" of the "beauteous bloom." Then he approaches the snow-line, that "margin of unmelting snow" which marks the place where vegetation ceases and the eternal snows commence. Here he pauses, and hails the "White realm of peace above the flowering line," the rocky, frozen world that rises above him.

But, of course, Holmes's poem goes considerably beyond this superficial level. He has left the valley, the source of life and beauty, with no regrets at forsaking the "bright enamelled zones below." Evidently, then, he must have a good reason for leaving the valley, which is not only the source of beauty but also of vitality, of life. Approaching the snow-line--that line of demarcation between life and death--the flowers become "flowerets, scentless pale," growing on "ice-clad stems all trembling" from the icy winds. He is approaching the great wastes of ice and snow, the land where life is absent.

Yet, although this is a lifeless land he approaches, he hails it with "unsaddened voice," this "White realm of peace above the flowering line." If this lifeless land is the land of peace, then we can logically assume that the beautiful valley he has left behind is symbolic of lack of peace--whatever form that may take.

The meaning of the poem is completed with the enunciation of two key points in the last four lines. This is a region where the planets shine "undimmed," where heaven is "unclouded blue," because on the "majestic alters" of the mountains "fade the fires / That filled the air with smoke of vain desires." Here, then, we have the explanation of why the speaker had left the valley: life and beauty are to be found there, but there also are "vain desires" which fill the sky with smoke. To escape this sort of life, the speaker has come to the desolate reaches of the high mountains, which, though lifeless, are nonetheless a region of peace.

The form of this sonnet most closely approaches that of the Miltonic sonnet, which does not follow the natural break in sense between the octave and sestet, as the Petrarchan sonnet does. The rhyme scheme of Holmes's poem also follows that of the Miltonic sonnet: abba abba cd cd cd, with the exception that the last four lines of Holmes's poem rhyme cddc. But, as we have seen, the last four lines of the Holmes sonnet provide the key to the poem; hence the enclosing of the two key lines--12 and 13--by the rhymes of 11 and 14, is an ingenious use of rhyme to emphasize meaning.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. There are two levels of meaning in this poem. Outline both briefly.

2. Generally speaking, poets refer to valleys as sources of life and beauty, and they refer to icy mountain pinnacles as desolate regions, devoid of life and having only a very unusual kind of beauty. Discuss whether this statement is applicable to Holmes's poem, or to what extent it is.
3. Why has the speaker left the valley? Note especially the last four lines.
4. What is a "snow-line"? Is the meaning clear from the context, or must you go to another source (like a dictionary) to find out?
5. In line nine, the speaker calls the region he has come to the "White realm of peace." What, then, can we logically assume he would call the valley?
6. Has the speaker left the valley willingly or not? Prove your point.
7. Discuss the form of this sonnet, showing both how it resembles and how it differs in form from other sonnets you have studied.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: "Ultima Thule"

#### EXPLICATION:

Here again we have a poem which deals with a journey that can be discussed on more than one level. On the most elementary level, the ship is in the port of Ultima Thule, the "utmost Isle," where the sailors (including the speaker) are resting from their quest. Their original destination was the Hesperides, the "blessed isles" of Greek myth, but "that was long ago," and since then "the ocean streams" have driven them away from this land, which the speaker calls "The lost Atlantis of our youth." Then they had been driven to the storm-tossed Orcades, "Where sea-gulls scream, and breakers roar," and wrecks of ships line the shore. This is "Ultima Thule," the northernmost limit of the habitable world, where they will rest before continuing their "unending endless quest."

On a higher, and more important, level, the poem is the meditation of the speaker on the contrast between his early life and his more advanced age, with the journey as the unifying element. The first stanza stands in contrast to the other three: the winds had been favorable, the seas sunlit, and the objective the Hesperides, "The land where golden apples grow." The impression one gets here is of youthful vigor in quest of a pleasurable goal. "But that, ah! that was long ago"; time has passed, and, with it, their youthful goal of the "golden apples." The ocean streams have swept them away "from the land of dreams," from "The lost Atlantis of our youth!" from "That land of fiction and of truth." There is no contradiction in the latter; the land for which they had originally set sail long ago is qualified in the second stanza in terms of both truth and fiction, imagination and reality.

In the third and fourth stanzas they have reached a port--Ultima Thule--in the "tempest-haunted Orcades," a land of storms and shipwrecks and roaring breakers and sea-weed. They will rest awhile before setting out again on

"the unending endless quest." This last line, with its redundant modifiers, is especially expressive of disappointment and sadness. They have reached, instead of the land of golden apples, the northernmost habitable limits of the world. Beyond this, there is nothing.

One further level of interpretation is possible which it may be interesting to discuss. This poem was written in 1880, when Longfellow was 73, just two years before his death. Taken autobiographically, then, the poem is expressive of an old man's sorrow at seeing the hopes of youth arrive at barrenness.

The theme of this work is a variation on that theme we have seen in Housman's "When I Was One-and-Twenty" and Hood's "I Remember, I Remember." These two works deal with the passage from youthful innocence to saddened maturity. In Longfellow's poem old age looks back with sorrow at the unfulfilled plans of youth. Life is likened to a voyage by ship, a voyage which has purpose, direction; but the "ocean streams" of life, the vagaries and misfortunes of man's existence, lead him only to the Utmost Isle, the cold, bleak term of life.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What indications are there in this poem that the work is not concerned only with a voyage by ship? --Note second stanza especially.
2. There is a strong contrast between the first three lines and the rest of the poem. Discuss the nature of this contrast.
3. In the last line, why did Longfellow say "unending endless" instead of simply using one word or the other? What effect is gained by using these two words, which are almost identical in meaning?
4. Using your own words, rewrite the second stanza in prose.
5. Write down the subject of this poem in one sentence of just two or three lines.

Edgar Allan Poe: "Eldorado"

#### EXPLICATION:

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this poem is its versification.

        /  ∪  ∪  /  
        Gaily bedight,  
        ∪  /  ∪  /  
        A gallant knight,  
∪  /  ∪  /  ∪  /  
In sunshine and in shadow,  
        ∪  /  ∪  /  
        Had journeyed long,  
        /  ∪  ∪  /  
        Singing a song,  
∪  /  ∪  /  ∪  /  
In search of Eldorado.

The first and fifth lines are both composed of a trochee and an iamb, the second and fourth lines have each two iambs, and the third and sixth lines have each three iambs followed by one unaccented syllable. The rhyme scheme is a.a b c c b.

The same general pattern is followed in the second and third stanzas: in both, the first and fifth lines have the same meter, the second and fourth, and the third and sixth. The only difference is that lines 1 and 5 consist of two iambs instead of, as in the first stanza, a trochee and an iamb. The rhyme scheme is the same in all three stanzas.

The last stanza, which provides the answer to the knight's question, may be scanned in this manner:

/     ∪     ∪     /     ∪  
"Over the Mountains  
      ∪     ∪     /     ∪  
      Of the Moon,  
/     ∪     /     ∪     ∪     /     ∪  
Down the Valley of the Shadow,  
      /     /     ∪     /     ∪  
      Ride, boldly ride,"  
      ∪     /     ∪     /     ∪  
      The shade replied, --  
∪     ∪     /     ∪     /     ∪     /     ∪  
"If you seek for Eldorado!"

The effect of Poe's versification is quite noticeable. In the first three stanzas, as the knight rides on his quest, the movement of the verse is correspondingly rapid and abrupt, with a brief "slowing" motion in every third line. It should be noted that the third line of each of the first three stanzas refers to "shadow," for which the less rapid motion is appropriate; and the sixth line of each refers to the golden object of the search. The last stanza, the shadow's reply, is noticeable especially for its rather awkward, somewhat confused movement, most appropriate to the strange reply given by a strange figure--"a pilgrim shadow."

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. The meter and rhyme scheme of this poem are both somewhat unusual. Scan the first stanza carefully.
2. Scan the second stanza, and point out the similarities and differences between the first two stanzas. Then scan the third stanza, and compare it with the other two.
3. How are the meter and rhyme scheme of these three stanzas appropriate to the story?
4. Why do you think the third and sixth lines of each stanza are longer than the other lines?

5. This is not just the usual story about searching for a gold mine. What two details in the first three stanzas make you aware of this?--The searcher is a medieval knight, and he meets, not a man, but "a pilgrim shadow."
6. The knight asks the "pilgrim shadow" where he can find Eldorado; the shadow answers in a very vague, puzzling manner. Discuss how the meter of this stanza is appropriate to the confusing answer the shadow gives.

John Keats: "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer"

#### EXPLICATION:

Keats's "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer" clearly demonstrates how well a poet can use the Petrarchan sonnet to develop or intensify a thought. It has a two-part development which correlates its division of form to its division of ideas. In the first eight lines (octave) Keats travels through many regions of poetry, finally entering the world of Homer through Chapman's translation of the Greek epic poet. In the remaining six lines (sestet) Keats describes his feeling as that of an explorer making new discoveries. This basic 8--6 division is typical of the Petrarchan (or Italian) sonnet, and poets use the form to develop particular thought patterns: to question, then answer; to state, then justify; to complain, then console; to boast, then criticize.

In Keats's sonnet the metaphor of exploring Homer's "wide expanse" dominates the octave and is effective in communicating a literary experience. It conveys a sense of spaciousness as well as the excitement of exploration. Throughout these eight lines a sense of vastness and movement seems to come through, reflecting a Renaissance feeling for wealth, beauty, excitement, and exploration. The connotative qualities of words such as "states," "kingdoms," "fealty," "demesne," and "realms of gold" create this richness. The excitement anticipated in exploring the scope of Homer's epic is illustrated in lines five and six:

Of one wide expanse had I been told  
That deep-brow'd Homer rules as his demesne;

The nature of this discovery is positively stated in line eight:

Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold!

Although still creating a feeling of spaciousness, the sestet develops a different attitude toward the total experience. Whereas strength and action dominate the octave, meditation and a feeling of silent awe control the sestet. When Keats compares himself to an astronomer discovering a new planet, he establishes a sense of silent, momentary disbelief. In line ten the verb "swim" adds the necessary precision for the simile. When one peers through a telescope, he does not immediately see a clearly delineated planet. Rather

there is a moment of focusing and adjusting as the viewer pauses--failing to realize immediately what is happening. Then the planet appears sharply visible. The moment of discovery staggers the imagination, just as the explorers here "Looked at each other with a wild surmise."

This poem has constantly expanded one theme: the thrill of discovering Homer. Keats's final simile, a comparison of this discovery to Cortez's (actually, of course, Balboa's) discovery of the Pacific Ocean culminates the emotional progression. This image, in the last four lines, becomes the final expression of awe. Balboa may have discovered the Pacific, but the word "Cortez" (regardless of whether Keats used this word mistakenly or not) has the sound Keats needed to complete his magnificent picture of a "stout" explorer staring "with eagle eyes" at the Pacific from the most eastern part of Panama, the Isthmus of Darien.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What are the two parts of this poem and how are they related to each other?
2. What do these terms refer to: "realms of gold," "western islands," "demesne"?
3. Explain line four. Note that your dictionary refers to "fealty" as an archaic word. List the other archaic words in this poem, and then comment on how they affect the tone of the poem.
4. What is the effect, in the last six lines, of terms such as "watcher of the skies," "swims," "eagle eyes"?
5. Even though Balboa, not Cortez, discovered the Pacific, does this error change the value of the poem? Why or why not?
6. What is the poet's opinion of Chapman's translation of Homer? What new understandings and attitudes does Keats have after reading this translation? What qualities in this translation helped to bring about these understandings in Keats?
7. What is the significance of Keats's identification with astronomers and explorers who experienced moments of discovery? How does Keats feel now that he too is a "discoverer"?

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**LYRIC POETRY**

**Literature Curriculum III**

**Student Version**

TE000 196

The project reported herein was supported through the Cooperative Research Program of the Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

## LYRIC POETRY: PART ONE

### Introduction

What is a lyric poem? It is difficult to give a short definition, but it is possible to point out certain differences between a lyric and other forms of poetry. In the first place, a lyric is usually more personal than narrative poetry. The speaker in the poem frequently seems to be talking to himself; or if he is addressing an audience he is usually concerned with some personal attitude. Also, lyric poetry is primarily non-storied, as you observed in the eighth grade. While there may be a narrative element in some lyrics, the fundamental purpose of the lyric poem is something other than telling a story. In the eighth grade you read various narrative poems. "The Destruction of Sennacherib" is quite different from "The Man He Killed." The first is unmistakably a narrative poem; the second is really a lyric. The speaker of the latter poem is concerned with an intensely personal response to an incident, and is not so much telling a story as he is reflecting on the significance of the incident.

Inasmuch as the greatest writers have used the lyric form to convey their ideas and emotions, it is important to know how to read a lyric poem. A lyric can have any subject matter, for it ranges across all human experience. It can have any number of different verse forms and rhyme schemes. It makes use of all the various devices of language. It can range in tone from the solemn to the frivolous. Its purpose can be persuasion, description, reflection, comparison, or anything else. The poems you will read in this unit are designed to give you some familiarity with the various kinds of organization that occur in lyric poetry, the various technical devices of poetic language that poets use, the various tones or attitudes that poets take to their topics, and the various things that poets can write about. In other words, this unit gives you a more formal introduction to the wide variety of Subject, Form, and Point of View that is found in the lyric poem.

### "Dust of Snow"

by Robert Frost

The way a crow  
Shook down on me  
The dust of snow  
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart  
A change of mood  
And saved some part  
Of a day I had rued.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. Discuss the development of this poem.
2. Why do you think Frost has used a crow, instead of, for example, a hawk or a robin?
3. Why has Frost used the expression "dust of snow" instead of simply "snow"?
4. Although this poem can also be called a narrative poem (i. e., one which tells a story), why is it more precise to call it a lyric?

**"Winter"**

by William Shakespeare

When icicles hang by the wall,  
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,  
And Tom bears logs into the hall,  
And milk comes frozen home in pail,  
When blood is nipped and ways be foul,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
Tu-whit;  
Tu-who, a merry note,  
While greasy Joan doth keel\*the pot.

When all aloud the wind doth blow,  
And coughing drowns the parson's saw,  
And birds sit brooding in the snow,  
And Marian's nose looks red and raw,  
When roasted crabs\*hiss in the bowl,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
Tu-whit;  
Tu-who, a merry note,  
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. Draw up a list of all the details in "Winter" showing which of the five senses each detail appeal to.
2. Use your dictionary to find out the meaning of the expression "the parson's saw." There is a logical meaning, and also a humorous one.

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\*skm

\*crab apples

3. How has the poet so sharply conveyed the sensation of cold without using the word "cold" itself?
4. In verse or prose, describe one of the other seasons. Use details and images that convey your specific impression of the season, but do not state what your main impression is--let your details do it for you.

"A Narrow Fellow in the Grass"

by Emily Dickinson

A narrow Fellow in the Grass  
Occasionally rides--  
You may have met him? did you not  
His notice instant is--

The Grass divides as with a Comb--  
A potted shaft is seen,  
And then it closes at your Feet  
And opens further on--

He likes a Boggy Acre--  
A Floor too cool for Corn--  
But when a Boy, and Barefoot  
I more than once, at Morn.

Have passed I thought a Whip Lash  
Unbraiding in the Sun  
When stooping to secure it  
It wrinkled and was gone--

Several of Nature's People  
I know and they know me  
I feel for them a transport  
Of Cordiality

But never met this Fellow  
Attended or alone  
Without a tighter Breathing  
And Zero at the Bone.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is the subject of the poem?
2. The poem may be divided into two parts. Where would you draw the line? Why?
3. Which verbs in the poem convey movement? In what way are they effective verbs for the subject of this poem?

4. What other words, besides the verbs, suggest movement? Can you identify the simile and the metaphor?
5. Why does the poet alter the position of the last two words in stanza 1? Does this shift in any way contribute to the idea expressed in that line?
6. What is your attention mainly drawn to in stanza 2? Why?
7. In stanza 3, what two "snakelike qualities" are suggested?
8. What is meant by the phrase "a transport of cordiality?" How would you explain, in other terms, the poet's attitude toward most of "nature's people?"
9. What is the poet's feeling toward the "narrow fellow in the grass?" Which phrase or phrases most directly convey(s) this feeling? Is there anything in the first four stanzas to support that feeling?
10. Look back over the poem and count the times that the snake actually "appears" in the poem. If you actually "experienced" the snake, as most readers do while reading this poem, how do you account for that fact?

### "The Eagle"

by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Alliteration is the repetition, in successive or nearly-successive words, of the same consonant sound at the beginning of words, or of syllables within words. Note the repetition of the hard "c" sound in line 1. What impression does this sound convey, and how does it "fit" the eagle?
2. Why does Tennyson use the word "wrinkled" to describe the sea? To what is he comparing the sea? As you probably know, this kind of comparison is called metaphor--a word usually associated with one kind of thing is applied to another without any direct expression of comparison or similarity between the two.
3. The kind of comparison found in line 6 is called a simile. How does it differ from a metaphor?

4. What qualities of the eagle does Tennyson suggest in his poem? What quality dominates our impression of the eagle?

**"She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways"**

by William Wordsworth

She dwelt among the untrodden ways  
Beside the springs of Dove,  
A Maid whom there were none to praise  
And very few to love;

A violet by a mossy stone  
Half hidden from the eye!  
--Fair as a star, when only one  
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know  
When Lucy ceased to be;  
But she is in her grave, and, oh,  
The difference to me!

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. What is the meaning of the phrase "springs of Dove"? Does it make any difference to your interpretation whether or not you know what "Dove" refers to?
2. Discuss the two figures of speech in the second stanza. How are they related to each other?
3. What are the two main themes of this poem?
4. It is not known whom Wordsworth was referring to in "Lucy." Does it make any difference? What if she were to be identified as a blonde, blue-eyed, eighteen-year-old farmer's daughter who lived in Wales? Or a slim, dark-haired, twenty-four-year-old shopkeeper's daughter in Ireland?

**"Jenny Kiss'd Me"**

by Leigh Hunt

Jenny kiss'd me when we met,  
Jumping from the chair she sat in;  
Time, you thief, who love to get  
Sweets into your list, put that in!  
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,  
Say that health and wealth have miss'd me,  
Say I'm growing old, but add,  
Jenny kiss'd me.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. Hunt tells us no more about Jenny than Wordsworth did about Lucy. Is it for the same purpose?
2. Are there any significant differences in the two poems as far as our lack of knowledge of the two women is concerned?

**"A Red, Red Rose"**

by Robert Burns

O, my luvè is like a red, red rose,  
That's newly sprung in June,  
O my luvè is like the melodie  
That's sweetly played in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in luvè am I,  
And I will luvè thee still, my dear,  
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt wi' the sun!  
And I will luvè thee still, my dear,  
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only luvè,  
And fare thee weel awhile!  
And I will come again, my luvè,  
Though it were ten thousand mile!

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. A cliché can be defined as a set phrase which, through over-use, has become stale, has lost its original vividness (for example, white as snow, strong as a horse, green as grass). In this poem Burns has used several figures of speech which are very much like clichés, but yet are not--such as in line one. Find three or four of these, mentioning what the cliché is and how Burns has yet revised the clichés to produce strong, original figures of speech.
2. The speaker obviously loves the girl; but note also that he says he would walk ten thousand miles to see her if he had to. Discuss the speaker as both a lover and a braggart.
3. This poem is written in a simplified form of Burns's Scots' dialect. How do words like "lass," "luvè," and "gang" affect the poem?

**"When I Was One-and Twenty"**

by A. E. Housman

(For text, see Immortal Poems, Washington Square Press, Inc., 1952; p. 485.)

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. What is the dominant mood of this poem?
2. Discuss the contrast between the old man and the young man.
3. "This is a poem that deals with the sorrow of growing up." Discuss why this is or is not a fair statement.
4. Discuss the meaning of lines 11-14.
5. We know in a general way that the young man has had a disappointment in love. Why do you think Housman has not told us specifically what happened? Would it make any difference to know that, for example, the girl had accidentally drowned? Do you think that knowing something of this sort would make the poem better, or worse?

**"On the Grasshopper and the Cricket"**

by John Keats

The poetry of earth is never dead;  
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,  
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run  
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;  
That is the Grasshopper's--he takes the lead  
In summer luxury,--he has never done  
With his delights; for when tired out with fun

He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed,  
The poetry of earth is ceasing never:  
On a lone winter evening, when the frost  
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills  
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,  
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,  
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. There is a strong dividing point in this poem. Determine this point, and then discuss how the two parts are both similar and unlike.
2. Is the emphasis of this poem more on the grasshopper or more on the cricket?
3. Why do you think the phrase "is never dead" (line 1) is changed to "is ceasing never" (line 9)? Are the two phrases interchangeable?
4. What does Keats mean by "the poetry of earth"?

### "I Remember, I Remember"

by Thomas Hood

I remember, I remember,  
The house where I was born,  
The little window where the sun  
Came peeping in at morn;  
He never came a wink too soon,  
Nor brought too long a day,  
But now, I often wish the night  
Had borne my breath away!

I remember, I remember,  
The roses, red and white,  
The violets, and the lily-cups,  
Those flowers made of light!  
The lilacs where the robin built,  
And where my brother set  
The laburnum on his birthday, --  
The tree is living yet!

I remember, I remember,  
Where I was used to swing,  
And thought the air must rush as fresh  
To swallows on the wing;  
My spirit flew in feathers then,  
That is so heavy now,  
And summer pools could hardly cool  
The fever on my brow!

I remember, I remember,  
The fir trees dark and high;  
I used to think their slender tops  
Were close against the sky:  
It was a childish ignorance,  
But now 'tis little joy  
To know I'm farther off from heaven  
Than when I was a boy.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. What is the speaker of this poem doing?
2. Of this poem's 32 lines, only eight or nine express the poet's sadness, and all the other lines treat of his joy. Keeping these figures in mind, do you feel that this is a predominantly happy poem or a sad one?
3. The speaker tells us, quite indirectly, that his brother is dead. How does he do this?
4. Why is the adult man "farther off from heaven" than when he was a boy?

## LYRIC POETRY: PART TWO

### Introduction

The lyric poetry you will be studying in this unit focuses on one subject: the journey. Generally, we understand the journey to be the subject of novels or short stories or narrative poetry--poetry that tells a story. But lyric poetry, that kind of poetry which is concerned with one person's most deeply felt emotions, can also, in its own special ways, focus on the journey. Whether it is a man climbing a mountain, a knight searching for riches, a traveler pausing in his journey through woods, a poet praising books for letting him visit distant places and times, or a sailor dreaming of his return to the sea--these topics, which cover such a wide variety of man's activity, can all be the subjects of lyric poems.

Subject, form, and point of view work together as much in lyric poetry as they do in any other form of literature--perhaps even more so. These elements can also, however, be studied separately; for example, the subject of a poem can be studied apart from its meter and rhyme scheme--its form; its imagery can be studied, in some cases, apart from the poet's or the speaker's point of view; and the poet's point of view can be analyzed and discussed without reference to the other points. But in the end, a poem must always be discussed as a whole. It was composed as a complete work, as a sum total of many parts; hence, to view a poem only in its separate parts is to do the poem, and the poet, a serious wrong.

You will be asked certain questions which will help you to understand the subject, form, and point of view of each of the poems which follow. But the real test of your response to any study lies in the questions you ask. There is no doubt that answering questions requires knowledge, but asking them requires imagination, and imagination is certainly the instrument of the poet. Let yours work for you.

### "There Is No Frigate Like a Book"

by Emily Dickinson

There is no frigate like a book  
To take us lands away,  
Nor any coursers like a page  
Of prancing poetry.  
This traverse may the poorest take  
Without oppress of toll;  
How frugal is the chariot  
That bears a human soul!

### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. This poem is about a journey. Where does this journey take the traveler? How will he get to his destination?

2. Discuss the travel images the poet uses.
3. Is the word "frigate" appropriate to represent a book? Why or why not? Is "coursers" appropriate for poetry? Is it better than "horses" would be in this poem?
4. A poet is expected to be accurate. What do you think of the phrase "prancing poetry"?
5. How does the lack of punctuation in this poem affect the way it is read?

**"Stopping By Woods On a Snowy Evening"**

by Robert Frost

(For text, see Immortal Poems, pp. 503-504.)

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. Where is the narrator and what is he doing?
2. Does he seem to be at home in his surroundings?
3. Why did he stop? Is this clearly stated in the poem?
4. Why might his horse think it queer to stop in this lonely but beautiful spot? What might the owner think about someone stopping in his woods? Does stanza one suggest personality differences of both men?
5. Notice the concrete imagery in stanzas one and two. What do they have in common? How do the concrete words in stanza three differ from those in stanzas one and two?

6. Determine the rhyme scheme of these three stanzas. In what way does it help shape the various images presented?
7. Could Robert Frost have ended his poem with the third stanza?
8. Read the complete poem. What would you say is the attitude of the narrator toward his subject?
9. Study the final stanza. Might the narrator be concerned with more than just the experience of enjoying a lovely natural scene? Notice all the long vowels in this stanza. What do they tend to do to the line? Why is the last line repeated?
10. Now work back through the poem. Might the following words represent something beside their literal meanings: "woods," "dark," "downy flake," "house"?
11. = What promises in life must one keep?
12. How do you interpret "asleep"?
13. How far must one travel before he sleeps?

### "Sea Fever"

by John Masefield

(For text, see Collected Poems by John Masefield, Macmillan Company, renewed 1940 by John Masefield,)

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. In a few sentences, sum up what this poem is about.
2. What can you discover about the narrator? Is he young or old? Is he still sailing the seas? Is he relating a particular voyage? What phases of a sailor's life does he suggest in each stanza?
3. To what one of your senses does the imagery of the first stanza appeal? The second stanza? Which stanza presents the most general images? Why?
4. The last line of the poem suggests more than one meaning. For example what additional meaning could you give to "sleep"?
5. Try to determine the two basic patterns of meter in this poem. Read the first line in a natural manner, and mark the accented and unaccented syllables. Then consider this reading:

        /    /    /    /    /    /    /    /    /    /    /    /    /  
I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and the sky.

Notice the two types of feet: the iamb ( / ) and the anapest ( / / / ). Now see whether the remaining lines of the poem contain seven stresses to each line and a similar rhythm pattern. Why do you think John Masefield chose this rhythm for this particular poem?

**"The Lake Isle of Innisfree"**

by William Butler Yeats

(For text, see The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats, The Macmillan Company, 1959; p. 39.)

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. **Innisfree is a little island located in Lough Gill (Lake Gill), one of Ireland's many lakes. As a boy, William Butler Yeats knew of this island. Now, as a mature poet, he is determined to return to Innisfree. What does he plan to do on the island?**
2. **Yeats depends heavily on sight and sound images to develop his thought. List all the things you see and hear as you read through the poem.**
3. **Besides telling the reader directly what kind of sounds are associated with his tale (the cricket singing, "the bee loud glade"), the poet uses other devices designed to develop musicality. You have already learned several of these devices in your study of poetry. Identify the figures of speech used in the following:**
  - (a) **"a hive for the honeybee."**
  - (b) **"I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;"**
4. **What is the rhyme scheme in each stanza?**
5. **What obvious punctuation difference do you see between the ending of line nine and all the other lines? What determines end punctuation? Ask your teacher to explain the terms "end-stopped" and "run-on."**
6. **How do the first, second, and third lines in each stanza compare in length with the fourth line? Answer this question by counting the stressed syllables. They will be easier to count if you consider the syllable before the mid-line comma to be unstressed.**
7. **Stanza two talks about the peace and rest the poet hopes to find on Innisfree. Read stanzas one and two aloud several times. See if you can sense the slower pace of stanza two. Can you see anything in the structure of the stanza that produces this slower pace?**
8. **To what do the "roadway" and the "pavement grey" refer? This may be easier to answer if you recall the kind of place to which the poet wishes to go. Obviously, "pavement grey" is only a part of this place which the poet wishes to leave. This is a figure of speech called metonymy. A dictionary will define this term for you.**
9. **The poet says that he will arise and go to Innisfree. Do you think that he is as much concerned with the place as he is with what he knows he will find there? Explain your answer.**

"Nearing the Snow-Line"

by Oliver Wendell Holmes

Slow toiling upward from the misty vale,  
I leave the bright enamelled zones be-  
low;  
No more for me their beauteous bloom  
shall glow,  
Their lingering sweetness load the morning  
gale;  
Few are the slender flowerets, scentless,  
pale,  
That on their ice-clad stems all trembling  
blow  
Along the margin of unmelting snow;  
Yet with unsaddened voice thy verge I hail,  
White realm of peace above the flower-  
ing line;  
Welcome thy frozen domes, thy rocky  
spires!  
O'er thee undimmed the moon-girt  
planets shine,  
On thy majestic alters fade the fires  
That filled the air with smoke of vain de-  
sires,  
And all the unclouded blue of heaven is  
thine!

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. There are two levels of meaning in this poem. Outline both briefly.
2. Generally speaking, poets refer to valleys as sources of life and beauty, and they refer to icy mountain pinnacles as desolate regions, devoid of life and having only a very unusual kind of beauty. Discuss whether this statement is applicable to Holmes's poem, or to what extent it is.
3. Why has the speaker left the valley? Note especially the last four lines.
4. What is a "snow-line"? Is the meaning clear from the context, or must you go to another source (like a dictionary) to find out?
5. In line nine, the speaker calls the region he has come to the "White realm of peace." What, then, can we logically assume he would call the valley?
6. Has the speaker left the valley willingly or not? Prove your point.
7. Discuss the form of this sonnet, showing both how it resembles and how it differs in form from other sonnets you have studied.

"Ultima Thule"

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

With favoring winds, o'er sunlit seas,  
We sailed for the Hesperides,  
The land where golden apples grow;  
But that, ah! that was long ago.

How far, since then, the ocean streams  
Have swept us from that land of dreams,  
That land of fiction and of truth,  
The lost Atlantis of our youth!

Whither, ah, whither? Are not these  
The tempest-haunted Orcades,  
Where sea-gulls scream, and breakers roar,  
And wreck and sea-weed line the shore?

Ultima Thule! Utmost Isle!  
Here in thy harbors for a while  
We lower our sails; a while we rest  
From the unending, endless quest.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. What indications are there in this poem that the work is not concerned only with a voyage by ship?
2. There is a strong contrast between the first three lines and the rest of the poem. Discuss the nature of this contrast.
3. In the last line, why did Longfellow say "unending endless" instead of simply using one word or the other? What effect is gained by using these two words, which are almost identical in meaning?
4. Using your own words, rewrite the second stanza in prose.
5. Write down the subject of this poem in one sentence of just two or three lines.

"Eldorado"

by Edgar Allan Poe

Gaily bedight,  
A gallant knight,  
In sunshine and in shadow,  
Had journeyed long,  
Singing a song,  
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old,  
This knight so bold,  
And o'er his heart a shadow  
Fell as he found  
No spot of ground  
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength  
Failed him at length,  
He met a pilgrim shadow.  
"Shadow," said he,  
"Where can it be--  
This land of Eldorado?"

"Over the Mountains  
Of the Moon,  
Down the Valley of the Shadow,  
Ride, boldly ride,"  
The shade replied,  
"If you seek for Eldorado!"

#### STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. The meter and rhyme scheme of this poem are both somewhat unusual. Scan the first stanza carefully.
2. Scan the second stanza, and point out the similarities and differences between the first two stanzas. Then scan the third stanza, and compare it with the other two.
3. How are the meter and rhyme scheme of these three stanzas appropriate to the story?
4. Why do you think the third and sixth lines of each stanza are longer than the other lines?
5. This is not just the usual story about searching for a gold mine. What two details in the first three stanzas make you aware of this?
6. The knight asks the "pilgrim shadow" where he can find Eldorado; the shadow answers in a very vague, puzzling manner. Discuss how the meter of this stanza is appropriate to the confusing answer the shadow gives.

"On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer"

by John Keats

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;  
Round many western islands have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold,  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told  
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne;  
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
He stared at the Pacific--and all his men  
Looked at each other with a wild surmise--  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. What are the two parts of this poem and how are they related to each other?
2. What do these terms refer to: "realms of gold," "western islands," "demesne"?
3. Explain line four. Note that your dictionary refers to "fealty" as an archaic word. List the other archaic words in this poem, and then comment on how they affect the tone of the poem.
4. What is the effect, in the last six lines, of terms such as "watcher of the skies," "swims," "eagle eyes"?
5. Even though Balboa, not Cortez, discovered the Pacific, does this error change the value of the poem? Why or why not?
6. What is the poet's opinion of Chapman's translation of Homer? What new understandings and attitudes does Keats have after reading this translation? What qualities in this translation helped to bring about these understandings in Keats?
7. What is the significance of Keats's identification with astronomers and explorers who experienced moments of discovery? How does Keats feel now that he too is a "discoverer"?

OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

TEST: INTRODUCTION TO LYRIC POETRY  
Literature Curriculum III

NOTE: Students may refer to their copy of the poems during the test.

Instructions to students:

Answers to the questions are to be recorded on the separate answer sheets provided. PLEASE BE SURE TO USE ONLY SIDE A OF THE ANSWER SHEET, THE SIDE THAT HAS ROOM FOR 5 CHOICES.

Use a soft lead pencil (#2 or softer) and completely fill the space between the lines for the response you choose as the correct answer. Your score on this test will be the number of correct answers you mark. There is only one best answer for each item.

Sample test item: Who is the chief executive of the United States Government?  
(1) The President  
(2) The Secretary of State  
(3) The Secretary of Defense  
(4) The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court

Since the correct answer is 1, the answer sheet is marked like this:

Sample Test item: 1 2 3 4 5  
X | | | | |

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The Project reported herein was supported through the Cooperative Research Program of the Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

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## INTRODUCTION TO LYRIC POETRY

1. Lyric poetry differs from narrative poetry in which important way?
  - (1) The lyric is shorter.
  - (2) The lyric is more personal.
  - (3) The lyric never tells a story.
  - (4) The lyric is harder to read.
2. In Shakespeare's "Winter," both stanzas begin with when clauses which are followed by then clauses. What effect does this have?
  - (1) It gives the cause and effect of winter.
  - (2) It gives both sides of an unhappy time.
  - (3) It provides a contrast of cold and warmth.
  - (4) It emphasizes the need to prepare for winter.
3. What is the mood of the poem?
  - (1) Resentment toward nature's cruelty
  - (2) Fear of the danger of cold weather
  - (3) Joy over having a warm room and meal in such weather
  - (4) Gloom over the inconveniences winter imposes
4. What is meant by the second line of the first stanza, "And Dick the sheperd blows his nail,"? The sheperd, Dick, is
  - (1) attempting to start a fire by blowing on the flame
  - (2) warming his hand by blowing on it
  - (3) calling his flock
  - (4) expressing anger at the cold weather
5. Shakespeare makes the cold seem very real to us. He achieves this effect
  - (1) By imagery that appeals to our senses of touch, sound, and sight.
  - (2) By the "frozen" meter which gives the impression of being ice-bound.
  - (3) By repeating how cold it is.
  - (4) By using ice as a symbol of winter.

### "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass"

6. In the last stanza of "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass" "tighter breathing, and zero at the bone" are evidences of what?
  - (1) excitement
  - (2) fear
  - (3) joy
  - (4) confusion
7. What effect does the change in meter in alternate lines have in the poem, "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass"?
  - (1) It emphasizes the elusiveness of a snake.
  - (2) It causes a jerky feeling which is like the heart beat of a person who has just been frightened by a snake.
  - (3) It indicates that snakes are of all sizes and lengths.
  - (4) It shows that snakes crawl at different speeds.

8. What can you conclude about the author from the last two stanzas of the poem?
- (1) The author likes people better than snakes.
  - (2) A lot of people are like snakes.
  - (3) Snakes affect the author differently from the way other wild life does.
  - (4) The author does not like to meet snakes when alone.

**"The Eagle"**

9. The last line "And like a thunderbolt he falls," is a fitting climax to the poem because it suggests that
- (1) The eagle needs food.
  - (2) The eagle should leave his high perch.
  - (3) The power referred to in the poem is released.
  - (4) Even the eagle cannot stand thunder and lightning storms.

**"To a Waterfowl"**

10. What idea is emphasized by the use of the terms "solitary way," "lone wandering," "dark night," and "abyss of heaven"?
- (1) aimlessness of life
  - (2) the dependence of man in the vastness of the world.
  - (3) mystery of migration patterns
  - (4) fear of our fellow man
11. The rhyme scheme of the poem is
- (1) abba
  - (2) abca
  - (3) aabb
  - (4) abab
12. The poet, upon watching the bird, comes away from his experience
- (1) sorrowful
  - (2) full of trust
  - (3) happy
  - (4) puzzled
13. According to the poet, the bird's greatest danger is
- (1) man
  - (2) getting lost
  - (3) fatigue
  - (4) darkness

**"The Tables Turned"**

14. Wordsworth encourages his friend to
- (1) quit school
  - (2) enjoy the beauty of nature
  - (3) learn from nature
  - (4) be carefree

15. What does the phrase "meddling intellect" suggest?
- (1) a healthy curiosity
  - (2) a mind that makes disorder as it searches
  - (3) a dull brain
  - (4) a gossip
16. "barren leaves" in stanza 8 tells us
- (1) it is autumn
  - (2) the trees are putting on leaves
  - (3) books are dull and unrewarding
  - (4) we forget what we learn from reading
17. If you were the person to whom Wordsworth had addressed his poem, in view of what ~~he~~<sup>she</sup> had said to Wordsworth, you would likely have replied,
- (1) "I must learn from what others have discovered about the world as well as from my own interpretations".
  - (2) "I agree more can be learned from first hand observation than in any other way."
  - (3) "I am sorry but smarter men than I have lived who never walked through the woods."
  - (4) "I will be right with you as soon as I put my things away."

"The Passionate Shepherd to His Love"

18. What does the sheperd not promise?
- (1) music
  - (2) clothes
  - (3) love
  - (4) flowers

"The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd"

19. The nymph implies that she will not accept the shepherd's invitation chiefly because
- (1) She doesn't want the delights he offers.
  - (2) He might not be telling the truth.
  - (3) These joys will not last.
  - (4) The shepherd will not remain faithful.
20. What is the mood of this poem?
- (1) lighthearted
  - (2) realistic
  - (3) sentimental
  - (4) unemotional

"Shall I Compare Thee"

21. The answer to the opening question is:
- (1) Yes, but your beauty is greater.
  - (2) Yes, because all the good things of summer show in your beauty.
  - (3) No, summer's beauty won't last, but yours will endure.
  - (4) No, because your beauty defies description.

22. The structure of the poem is typical of the Shakespearean sonnet which has
- (1) A question and an answer
  - (2) An octave followed by a sestet
  - (3) A rhyme scheme: ababcdcdefefgg
  - (4) A series of couplets

23. The last two lines;  
"So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee."  
refer to:
- (1) The woman
  - (2) The love of the poet
  - (3) The poem
  - (4) The eternal life of mankind

**"My Mistress' Eyes"**

24. Much of the power of this poem comes from the author's unwillingness to
- (1) exaggerate about the beauty of his love
  - (2) tell the truth
  - (3) admit that he loves his mistress
  - (4) pay her a compliment
25. The two sonnets differ in that the poet
- (1) speaks of general characteristics in the first and specific ones in the second
  - (2) changes from overstatement to understatement
  - (3) praises his love's beauty in one and not in the other
  - (4) changes the rhythm and rhyme structure
26. What does "belied" mean in this poem?
- (1) believed
  - (2) lied
  - (3) misrepresented
  - (4) tried to achieve

**"Sweet Disorder"**

27. Herrick suggests in this poem that
- (1) Women ought to be careful about their appearance.
  - (2) Men are attracted by women's clothing.
  - (3) Untidiness is quite permissible.
  - (4) Slight disorder can attract more favor than complete order.

**"The Constant Lover"**

28. What is the significance of repeating the last line of stanza three in stanza four?
- (1) It emphasizes the lover's constancy.
  - (2) It gives added tributes to the girl's charm.
  - (3) It adds a serious note.
  - (4) It suggests the lover is changing his mind.

Part II  
"There Is No Frigate Like a Book"

29. What is the "frugal chariot that bears the human soul?"
- (1) a cheap book
  - (2) an economical carrier
  - (3) a book which gives new understanding
  - (4) the body
30. What is the rhythm pattern of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" as represented by the first line; "Whose woods these are I think I know. "?
- (1) /- /- /- /-
  - (2) /- - /- - /-
  - (3) - /- /- /-
  - (4) - - /- - /-
31. In the last stanza of Frost's poem he maintains a steady rhythm, makes all four lines rhyme, and repeats the last stanza. This suggests
- (1) the monotonous jogging of a horse
  - (2) the dull routine of duty
  - (3) the ending of the poet's uncertainty when he was tempted to turn aside
  - (4) all of the above

"On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer"

32. What has the discovery of a new planet or of the Pacific Ocean to do with reading Homer?
- (1) The poet is comparing the heroes of Homer to astronomers and explorers.
  - (2) The reader feels the same thrill of discovery.
  - (3) Homer speaks of astronomers and explorers.
  - (4) Nothing really.

"The Song of the Chattahoochee"

33. What poetic device is employed in the line "And a myriad flowers mortally yearn, " ?
- (1) Personification
  - (2) Simile
  - (3) Metaphor
  - (4) Alliteration

"Sea Fever"

34. When a line of a poem ends on an unstressed syllable, that line is said to have
- (1) a masculine ending
  - (2) a feminine ending
  - (3) a neuter ending
  - (4) a poor ending

35. "... the wind's like a whetted knife" is an example of
- (1) personification
  - (2) alliteration
  - (3) metaphor
  - (4) simile