



The Solitary Reaper

William Wordsworth

A. Lead in :

A thing of beauty is joy forever. The scenic view of a picturesque sight pleases our eyes. The haunting melody of a cuckoo soothes our soul. A soulful tone of a singer amuses our heart. The moment we take leave of this sight or sound, they occur to us recurringly in a flashback. We can hardly part with them. The voice and the vision have a long lasting effect on us. They continue to be a perennial memory with us. They never cease to be.

Have you ever experienced such charming beauty and music? You must have. Well, let's read the following poem to note how the music of a Scottish girl exercised an everlasting impact on the mind of the poet William Wordsworth.

B. Let's listen to the Poem :

Listen to William Wordsworth's poem "The Solitary Reaper." Your teacher will recite the poem or use 'You Tube' to play the poem.

Now read the poem silently to get the meaning and message out of the text.

C. The Text:

Behold her single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!

Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:

Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;—

I listen'd, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

D. About the Poet :

William Wordsworth was born on 7th April 1770, in Cockermouth in the Lake District, England. He is regarded as a worshipper of nature. Love of nature is a major theme of his poetry. He wrote about ordinary men and women in the language of the ordinary people. For him poetry is “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” arising from “emotions recollected in tranquility.” He died at Rydal Mount and Gardens, United Kingdom on April 23, 1850.

E. About the Poem:

In the present poem, “The Solitary Reaper”, Wordsworth depicts a ‘Solitary Highland Lass’, her sweet song and the profound effect of the song on him. The poem is one of Wordsworth’s finest lyrics.

F. Glossary and Notes:

behold	: to look at or see somebody or something
yon	: over there (old use)
solitary	: single or alone
Highland Lass	: a girl who lives in the highlands (mountain regions) of Scotland
melancholy strain	: sad song
vale	: valley

profound	: deep, having or come from a great depth
chaunt	: chant, sing
weary	: very tired after working hard for a long time
band	: a group of people
haunt	: a place visited frequently
shady haunt	: oasis, a place with water and trees in a desert for rest and relaxation
Arabian sands	: the desert of Arabia (the Middle East)
farthest Hebrides	: the most remote group of islands that lies to the north-west of Scotland
plaintive numbers	: sad music, mournful verse
humble lay	: ordinary song
sickle	: a tool for cutting grass or paddy
motionless	: without movement
Scotland	: A country which is a part of the United Kingdom

G. Let's understand the poem :

Answer the following questions orally. You may refer to the text with your world knowledge to locate the facts / information required.

1. What is the central idea of the poem? (Tick the correct answer.)

Reapers can sing like birds.

Sweet music appeals to all.

Beautiful experiences have long- lasting effects.

Rich harvest makes the reaper happy.

2. The setting of the poem is _____.

- (a) the Arabian deserts
- (b) the British Isles
- (c) the Hebrides Islands
- (d) the mountain regions of Scotland

3. Who are the people described in the poem?

4. Who does the expression 'Highland Lass' refer to? Why does he describe her as "Yon solitary Highland Lass?"

5. What is the girl doing?

6. Who does the poet say 'Stop here or gently pass'? Why does he say so?

7. Pick out the words which tell that the girl does not have anyone by her side.

8. What is the tone of her song – happy, sad, soothing or sympathetic?

9. 'Overflowing with sound'- Explain.

10. The solitary reaper's song reminds the poet of other singers. Who are they?

11. Who sings welcome notes? Where? For whom? What for?

12. Whose voice is thrilling?

13. Where does it sing? When?

14. Who does Wordsworth compare the farmer girl with? Why?

15. The peasant girl's song is not intelligible to the poet because _____
(Tick the right answer.)

- her song is in a dialect he does not understand.
- he is far away to hear the words of the song.

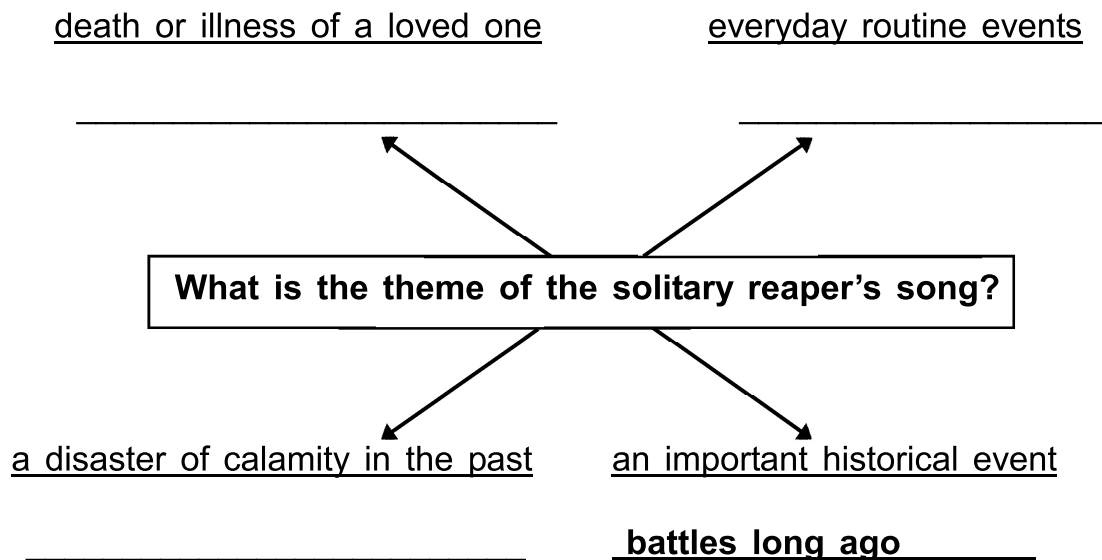
- her voice is not clear as she is humming the words.
 - her voice is too soft for him to get.
16. What does the phrase 'humble lay' mean?
 17. The expression 'plaintive numbers' refers to sad music. Pick out another phrase in the poem carrying the same meaning.
 18. What does the poet mean to say "As if her song could have no ending."?
Tick the most appropriate answer below.
 - Her song is too long to end.
 - She keeps on singing and seems not to end.
 - The poet does not want the song to end.
 - The song contains an everlasting universal theme which recycles.
 19. The poet listens 'motionless and still' because _____.
(Tick the right answer.)
 - the rich melodious voice of the singer holds him mesmerised and spellbound.
 - he was tired after walking uphill.
 - he wanted to learn the words and rhythm of the song.
 - he is rooted to the spot by the girl's beauty.
 20. How did the song affect the narrator?
 21. In stanza-1 and stanza-2, four words and phrases have been used to show that the girl working in the fields is without anyone by her. Pick out these words and phrases.
 22. The theme of the solitary reaper's song contains sadness . What other words are used in place of 'sad'?
 23. What are the two synonyms for the 'young girl'?
 24. Three other words are used to mean 'song'. What are they?
 25. 'A melancholy strain' in stanza-2 means 'sad song'. Find out another phrase in stanza-5 with similar meaning.
 26. Which word in stanza-5 expresses the poet's guess?

H Let's appreciate the poem :

1. Describe what picture on the valley and the farm worker come to your mind as you read the poem.
2. Why do you think Wordsworth has chosen the song of the nightingale and cuckoo for comparison with the solitary reaper's song?
3. Whose song is sweeter according to the poet- the nightingale and the cuckoo's or the solitary reaper's?

I. Let's write :

1. The poet cannot understand the words of the song, yet he raised several possibilities about its theme. In the diagram below are some of the possibilities. Read the stanzas -5 and 6, and find out the phrases that match each. Work in pairs and complete the diagram writing the correct phrases in the blanks. One is done for you.



2. In stanza – 3 and 4 , the poet compares the solitary reaper's song with that of the nightingale and the cuckoo. On the basis of your reading the poem and your imagination, complete the table below

with required information /facts. Work in groups of 4. Then check your findings with others in a brief class discussion.

Singer	Place	Listener	Impact on the listener
Solitary reaper	Scottish Highland	the poet	holds him spellbound
Nightingale			
Cuckoo			

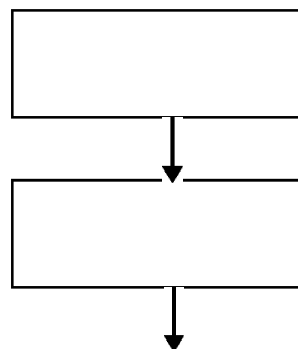
Now write one paragraph for each sub-table using the facts/ information available hereunder. One is done for you.

The solitary reaper was singing a melodious song as she reaped crops in the deep valley of Scottish Highlands. The poet chanced to see and hear her. The tone and the tune enchanted the poet. It held him mesmerised and spellbound. The poet stood motionless and still as he listened to the song.

3. Imagine that you are the poet, William Wordsworth. Just after hearing the solitary reaper, you will continue on your walk and reach home. Try to describe your experience to your younger brother what you saw and felt.
4. 'The Solitary Reaper' is a superb panorama of events that slowly and silently glides one to the other.

Given below a glimpse of the poet's lofty thoughts occurring in the poem. But they miss their sequence. Can you reorder them as they occur in the poem? Write (a) / (b) / (c)/ (d)/ (e) in the boxes to show the order.

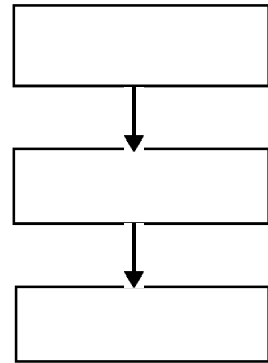
- (a) the poet's guess is that the solitary reaper's song contains a theme of sorrow, loss or pain.
- (b) Touching tone and melody of the song holds the poet mesmerised and spellbound.



(c) Poet walks up the hill
carrying the maiden's song
in his heart and head.

(d) The young farm worker sings to
herself as she is reaping the corn.

(e) Wordsworth compares the girl's song
with the songs of the nightingale and the cuckoo.



5. Given below is a description similar to your experience. But some words/ phrases are missing in it. Complete the description using appropriate words / phrases from the HELP BOX.

“Just now, I was walking _____, I saw a _____ in the field. She was _____ as she worked. I was so affected _____ that I _____.

She had _____, which seemed to _____. _____ was a sad one, and I could not _____. But its _____ and melancholy sound _____, and its _____ reminded me of the song of _____ and _____. After some time I walked _____, _____ of the young _____ with me.”

HELP BOX

beauty	up the hill	singing to herself
a nightingale	in the valley	stopped and listened
a cuckoo	by her singing	fill the whole valley
the song	a beautiful voice	understand the words
woman's song	young farm worker	touched me greatly
plaintive tone	carrying the memory	

6. Write answer to all the questions under “G. Let us understand the poem”.

