

Selected Poetry

by John Keats



READING 1E Use books of quotations (printed or electronic) as needed. **3** Evaluate the changes in form in poetry across literary time periods. **7** Analyze how the author's patterns of imagery reveal theme, set tone, and create meaning in metaphors, passages, and literary works. **RC-12(A)** Reflect on understanding to monitor comprehension.

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML12-878A

Meet the Author

John Keats 1795–1821

John Keats's life was tragically cut short by illness. Yet despite his early death at 25, he managed to compose some of the most evocative and exquisite poems in the English language.

Early Upheaval Born in 1795 to the manager of a livery stable, Keats spent his early years in a joyful household. These carefree times lasted until 1804, when his father died in a riding accident. In 1810, his mother died from tuberculosis. Despite this upheaval, Keats remained for a time at Enfield school, where a teacher, Charles Cowden Clarke, strongly encouraged his passion for reading and his literary ambitions.

A Passion for Poetry Shortly after the death of his mother, Keats was removed from school by his guardian and apprenticed to a surgeon. At the age of 18, he began writing poetry, which soon became the consuming passion of his life. After working as a wound dresser in a London hospital, Keats abandoned medicine for the less certain career of a poet. Initially, Keats experienced little success. His first book, *Poems* (1817), sold poorly, and critics savagely attacked his second book, *Endymion* (1818), a long narrative poem inspired by Greek

legend. Although the critical reviews disappointed Keats, they spurred him on.

Triumph and Tragedy Beginning in 1818, Keats confronted a series of physical and emotional crises. Overexerting himself during a walking tour that summer, he fell seriously ill and soon showed early symptoms of tuberculosis. In the fall, he watched as his beloved brother Tom endured the final, terrible stages of that disease and died. Adding greatly to his distress during this period was his passionate love for the young Fanny Brawne, whom he had met prior to Tom's death. Although he became engaged to Fanny, he was prevented by poor health and poverty from marrying her, a situation that caused him severe anguish. Amazingly, in the midst of this misfortune, Keats produced his greatest works. Widely praised by critics, these poems conveyed Keats's intense longing for Fanny, for immortality, and for the beauty of the natural world.

An Early End In the fall of 1820, as his illness progressed, Keats followed the advice of friends and moved to Italy in search of a milder climate. He died less than six months later and was buried in Rome under an epitaph he had composed for himself: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water."

DID YOU KNOW?

John Keats ...

- was a passionate admirer of William Shakespeare.
- became engaged to, but never married, the love of his life.
- wrote all of his masterpieces in one year, at the age of 22.

(background) Interior of Keats's house in Hampstead



Author Online



Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-878B

● POETIC FORM: ODE

An **ode** is an exalted, complex lyric poem that develops a single, dignified theme. Typically, odes have a serious tone and appeal to both the imagination and the intellect. Many commemorate events or praise people or the beauty of nature. Though the ode had existed since ancient times, the romantic poets gave this poetic form new life. Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "To Autumn," and "Ode to a Nightingale" are examples of odes.

● LITERARY ANALYSIS: IMAGERY

Keats's poetry is known for being full of sounds, sights, smells, and warmth. He achieves these sensations through **imagery**, words and phrases that appeal to one or more of the five senses and create sensory experiences for the reader. Sometimes, a poet will create imagery in which one sensation is described in terms of another; this technique is called **synesthesia**. For example, in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the phrase "Heard melodies are sweet" describes a sound in terms of a taste. As you read these poems, note the type of imagery Keats uses to vividly convey his ideas to the reader.

● READING STRATEGY: PARAPHRASE

Keats's poetry can be challenging to read because of the **inverted syntax**—a change in word order that places the verb before the subject. Poets of his era often inverted word order to meet the demands of poetic meter and rhyme. To help you understand the complex phrasing and sentence structures within the poems, **paraphrase**, or restate in your own words, difficult or confusing passages. As you read the poems, use a chart like the one shown to record your paraphrases.

Poem	Keats's Phrase	Paraphrase
"To Autumn"	"... bless/With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run"	Bless with fruit the vines that grow around the thatched roofs



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

What is BEAUTY?

Some people define beauty in physical terms, as in "That's a beautiful necklace." Others look at it in philosophical ways and try to equate beauty with another abstract idea, such as truth. John Keats saw beauty in both physical and philosophical terms. He also recognized beauty in things that you might not normally think of as beautiful. "I have loved the principle of beauty in all things," he once wrote.

QUICKWRITE Books of quotations, which can be found in library reference sections or online, can provide you with ideas about how famous writers over time have viewed important ideas and topics, such as the definition of *beauty*. Using a book of quotations, find some famous statements that deal with "beauty" or that define it in some way. Choose two that are quite dissimilar. In what ways do they differ? What do those differences reveal about each writer? Which do you think is more true?

When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be

John Keats

When I have fears that I may cease to be
 Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
 Before high piled books, in charactry,
 Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain;
5 When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
 Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
 And think that I may never live to trace
 Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance; **A**
 And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
10 That I shall never look upon thee more,
 Never have relish in the fairy power
 Of unreflecting love;—then on the shore
 Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
 Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

2 glean'd: collected all the bits from; examined bit by bit.

3 charactry: handwriting.

4 garners: storage bins.

A PARAPHRASE

In your own words, restate the meaning of lines 7–8.

Analyze Visuals ►

Describe the artist's use of light and shadow in the painting. What thoughts or emotions are suggested by the lighting?

Literary Analysis

- 1. Clarify** What two things does the speaker sometimes fear?
- 2. Interpret** In line 9, what does Keats mean by the phrase “fair creature of an hour”?



To Autumn

John Keats

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
5 To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
10 Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells. **B**

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
15 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
20 Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cider-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours. **C**

4 thatch-eaves: protruding edges of thatched roofs.

B IMAGERY

Reread lines 1–11. Point out words and phrases that suggest the abundance of the setting.

15 winnowing (wĭn'ō-ĭng): separating chaff from grain by blowing the chaff away.

17 hook: a scythe, or tool with a curved blade used for mowing and reaping.

18 swath: a row of grain to be cut.

C PARAPHRASE

Who is being addressed in lines 12–22? In your own words, restate the speaker's message.



Autumn Leaves (1856), Sir John Everett Millais. Oil on canvas, 104.3 cm × 74 cm.
© Manchester Art Gallery, United Kingdom/Bridgeman Art Library.

Where are the songs of Spring? Aye, where are they?
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too—
 25 While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue; **D**
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river shallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
 30 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
 Hedge crickets sing; and now with treble soft
 The redbreast whistles from a garden croft;
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

D IMAGERY

In line 26, Keats makes use of **synesthesia**. Identify the sensation that is used to describe another.

28 shallows: willow trees.

30 bourn: region.

31 treble soft: faint high pitch.

32 croft: a small enclosed field.

Ode on a Grecian Urn

John Keats

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
5 What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loath?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
10 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
15 Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
20 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! **E**

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
25 More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
30 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

3 Sylvan: pertaining to trees or woods.

5 haunts about: surrounds.

7 Tempe (tēm'pē') . . . **Arcady** (är'kə-dē): two places in Greece that became traditional literary settings for an idealized rustic life. Tempe is a beautiful valley; Arcady (Arcadia) is a mountainous region.

8 loath: unwilling; reluctant.

10 timbrels: tambourines.

Language Coach

Misused Words Both *sensual* and *sensuous* originally meant “of the senses”—the meaning in line 13. One word now relates more to the pleasure of the senses. Find out which one by checking a dictionary.

E ODE

Based on the imagery and ideas in the poem so far, what is being commemorated? Is it simply a Grecian urn? Explain.

29 cloy'd: having had too much of something; oversatisfied.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
 To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
 Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
 And all her silken flanks with garlands drest? **F**
 35 What little town by river or sea shore,
 Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
 Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
 And, little town, thy streets for evermore
 Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
 40 Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
 Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
 With forest branches and the trodden weed;
 Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
 45 As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
 When old age shall this generation waste,
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
 "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
 50 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

F PARAPHRASE

In your own words, describe the scene depicted in lines 32–34.

41 Attic: pure and classical; in the style of Attica, the part of Greece where Athens is located; **brede** (brēd): interwoven design.

45 Pastoral (pās'tər-əl): an artistic work that portrays rural life in an idealized way.

Literary Analysis

- 1. Clarify** In the first stanza of "Ode on a Grecian Urn," why is the urn referred to as a "sylvan historian"? What is the "flowery tale" it tells?
- 2. Draw Conclusions** In "To Autumn," what impression of autumn emerges from the description given? What attitude toward spring is implied?
- 3. Evaluate Poems** In both "To Autumn" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the speaker is directly addressing something as if it were present. This technique is known as **apostrophe**. Explain what or who is being addressed in each poem and whether or not this technique is effective in conveying the speaker's emotions toward the subject.

Ode to a Nightingale

John Keats

1

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
5 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness,—
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
10 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

2

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
15 O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
20 And with thee fade away into the forest dim: **G**

3

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
25 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
30 Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

2 hemlock: a poisonous plant.

4 Lethe-wards (lē'thē): into oblivion. The Lethe was a river in the underworld of Greek mythology; drinking its waters was said to bring forgetfulness.

7 Dryad (dri'əd): in Greek mythology, a nymph or god of the woods.

9 beechen: relating to beech trees.

11 draught (dräft) **of vintage:** drink of wine.

13 Flora: flowers. Flora was the Roman goddess of flowers.

14 Provençal (prō'vān-säl') **song:** a song from the southern French area of Provence.

16 blushful Hippocrene (hĭp'ə-krēn'): Hippocrene was the fountain used by the Muses, the Greek goddesses said to inspire poetry and the other arts.

G IMAGERY

Reread lines 11–20 and identify examples of **synesthesia**.

25 palsy (pôl'zē): paralysis of the muscles, usually accompanied by tremors.



Sleeping Shepherd—Morning (1857), Samuel Palmer. © Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom/Bridgeman Art Library.

4

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
 Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
 But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
 Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
 35 Already with thee! tender is the night,
 And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
 Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
 But here there is no light,
 Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
 40 Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

32 Bacchus (băk'əs) . . . **pards**: the ancient Roman god and the leopards that drove his chariot.

33 viewless: invisible; **Poesy** (pō'zē): poetry.

36 haply: perhaps.

37 Fays: fairies.

39 Save: except.

40 verdurous (vûr'jər-əs): green with plant life.

5

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
 But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows
 45 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
 Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
 And mid-May's eldest child,
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
 50 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

6

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,
 Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
 To take into the air my quiet breath;
 55 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
 In such an ecstasy!
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
 60 To thy high requiem become a sod.

7

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
 No hungry generations tread thee down;
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperor and clown:
 65 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
 The same that oft-times hath
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
 70 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

8

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
 Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
 As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
 75 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the next valley-glades:
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
 80 Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep? **H**

43 embalmed (ěm-bāmd'): perfumed.

46 pastoral (pās'tər-əl): rural;
eglantine (ěg'łən-tin'): honeysuckle
 or sweetbrier.

51 Darkling: in the dark.

53 mused: meditated; pondered.

60 requiem (rěk'wē-əm): funeral
 mass; **sod**: a piece of earth.

64 clown: rustic; peasant.

66 Ruth: the biblical Ruth, who
 left her native land to live with her
 husband's people.

69 casements: hinged windows that
 open outward.

73 fancy: the "viewless wings of
 Poesy" mentioned earlier.

H ODE

Describe the **tone** of this
 poem. How is it characteristic
 of an ode?

Reading for Information

LETTER John Keats wrote a number of poems for his fiancée, Fanny Brawne, and sent her dozens of letters. The following letter was written in February 1820, shortly after he became ill with the tuberculosis that would eventually take his life.

My dear Fanny,

Do not let your mother suppose that you hurt me by writing at night. For some reason or other your last night's note was not so treasurable as former ones. I would fain that you call me Love still. To see you happy and in high spirits is a great consolation to me—still let me believe that you are not half so happy as my restoration would make you. I am nervous, I own, and may think myself worse than I really am; if so you must indulge me, and pamper with that sort of tenderness you have manifested towards me in different Letters. My sweet creature when I look back upon the pains and torments I have suffered for you from the day I left you to go to the Isle of Wight; the ecstasies in which I have passed some days and the miseries in their turn, I wonder the more at the Beauty which has kept up the spell so fervently. When I send this round I shall be in the front parlor watching to see you show yourself for a minute in the garden. How illness stands as a barrier betwixt me and you! Even if I was well—I must make myself as good a Philosopher as possible. Now I have had opportunities of passing nights anxious and awake I have found other thoughts intrude upon me. “If I should die,” said I to myself, “I have left no immortal work behind me—nothing to make my friends proud of my memory—but I have loved the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remembered.” Thoughts like these came very feebly whilst I was in health and every pulse beat for you—now you divide with this (may I say it?) “last infirmity of noble minds” all my reflection.

God bless you, Love.

J. Keats

Comprehension

1. **Recall** In “Ode to a Nightingale,” what emotions does the speaker feel when he hears the bird’s song?
2. **Clarify** Why does the speaker long to join the nightingale?

Literary Analysis

3. **Paraphrase Quatrains** In each quatrain of the sonnet “When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be,” Keats examines an aspect of the fear of death. Paraphrase each quatrain, noting the parallel clauses at the beginning of each.
4. **Examine Personification** In “To Autumn,” how is autumn personified, or given human attributes, in each of the stanzas? Cite examples from the poem to support your answer.
5. **Analyze Sound Devices** Find examples of these sound devices—**alliteration**, **assonance**, **consonance**—in “Ode to a Nightingale.” How does each example contribute to the poem’s effect?
6. **Interpret Imagery** Think about the imagery in lines 41–50 in “Ode to a Nightingale.” In your own words, describe the scene the speaker conveys to the reader. Explain how these images are related to the nightingale and what they suggest about the nightingale’s song.
7. **Interpret Ambiguity** Reread the final **couplet**, lines 49–50, of “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” Explain what you think Keats meant to convey to his readers. Support your answer.
8. **Draw Conclusions About Odes** In “To Autumn,” “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” and “Ode to a Nightingale,” Keats expresses a deep appreciation for the beauty of nature and of art. What value does he seem to ascribe to beauty?
9. **Compare Texts** Look again at “When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be” and Keats’s letter to Fanny Brawne (page 889). Note the poetic language—such as **poetic diction**, **imagery**, and **figurative language**—in the poem, and then look for similar examples in the letter. Explain your choices.

Literary Criticism

10. **Biographical Context** Keats wrote the three odes you read following the death of his brother Tom and in the midst of his own worsening illness. In what ways are his experiences with illness and death reflected in the poems? Cite details to support your conclusions.



READING 3 Evaluate the changes in form in poetry across literary time periods. **7** Analyze how the author’s patterns of imagery reveal theme, set tone, and create meaning in metaphors, passages, and literary works. **RC-12(A)** Reflect on understanding to monitor comprehension.

What is **BEAUTY**?

Keats claims that, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty.” How may beauty conceal, rather than reveal, truth?

Romantic Ideals

Byron, Shelley, and Keats were men of fervent ideals who lived radical lives and poured their feelings into passionate verse.

*"She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:"*

—George Gordon, Lord Byron

Many of the ideas that the late romantics expressed have become intrinsic to Western culture, felt not only in art but in politics and even in the way people view themselves in relation to one another, to nature, and to the universe. In fact, these ideas are so pervasive in the modern world that some have gone so far as to say that the romantic era has yet to end.

Writing to Synthesize

Review the poems in this section (pages 848–890) and choose one from each poet. Look closely at the imagery and themes explored in the poems, and consider what they tell you about romantic ideas. Take notes in a chart like the one shown. Write a brief essay in which you discuss what the poems suggest about relationships, nature, or the human condition and how these ideas continue to be expressed in today's world.

	Poem #1	Poem #2	Poem #3
Imagery and Themes			
Ideas Conveyed			

Extension

LISTENING & SPEAKING Reread the excerpt from Shelley's *A Defense of Poetry* (page 876). Do you agree with his ideas about poetry's place in the world? Write a speech in which you pose your own defense of poetry and its role in today's world. Deliver the speech to your class.



WRITING 15A Write an analytical essay.