



**READING 3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, graphics, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods.

# The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML12-812A

## Meet the Author

### DID YOU KNOW?

Samuel Taylor Coleridge . . .

- developed a fascination with the supernatural at age five.
- was known as a brilliant and captivating conversationalist.
- was the most influential literary critic of his day.
- liked to write poetry while walking.

## Samuel Taylor Coleridge

1772–1834

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is famous for composing “Kubla Khan” and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” considered two of the greatest English poems. As a critic and philosopher, he may have done more than any other writer to spread the ideas of the English romantic movement.

**Precocious Reader** The youngest of ten children, Coleridge grew up feeling rejected by his distant mother and bullied by his older brother Frank. These early experiences gave rise to feelings of insecurity and loneliness that plagued Coleridge throughout life. Despite his self-doubt, Coleridge was an exceptional student who impressed classmates with his eloquence, his knowledge of classical languages, and his flair for writing poetry.

**Restless Youth** At Cambridge University, Coleridge continued to read widely and hone his craft. Troubled by debt, though, he left Cambridge in 1793 and enlisted in the 15th Dragoons, a British army regiment, under the alias Silas

Tomkyn Comberbach. After being rescued by his brothers, Coleridge returned to Cambridge, but he left again, in 1794, without having earned a degree. That year, Coleridge met the author

Robert Southey, and together they dreamed about establishing a utopian community in the Pennsylvania wilderness of America. Southey, however, backed out of the project, and their dream was never realized.

**Dream Poem** In 1795, Coleridge developed a close friendship with the poet William Wordsworth. Inspired by the encouragement and intellectual stimulation he received from Wordsworth, Coleridge entered his most creative period. Over the next few years, he produced a series of extraordinary poems, four of which appeared along with poems by Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Coleridge said that when they had planned this landmark collection, “it was agreed that my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic. . . .”

*Lyrical Ballads* opens with “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” Coleridge got the idea for the poem from a friend who had dreamed about a skeleton ship. Before composing it, Coleridge discussed the poem extensively with Wordsworth, who contributed several plot ideas and even a few lines of verse.

### Author Online



Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com). KEYWORD: HML12-812B



## ● POETIC FORM: LITERARY BALLAD

“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is a celebrated **literary ballad**, or narrative poem written in deliberate imitation of the traditional **folk ballad** (see page 217). Like older ballads, Coleridge’s masterpiece features sensational subject matter—the perilous journey of an old sailor. It also contains other conventional elements: dialogue, repetition of words and phrases, and strong patterns of rhyme and rhythm. However, there are aspects of the poem that reflect Coleridge’s own romantic writing style: his emphasis on the supernatural, his sophisticated use of sound devices, and his use of archaic language. For example, notice his description of a mysterious ghost ship:

*A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!  
And still it neared and neared:  
As if it dodged a water-sprite,  
It plunged, and tacked and veered.*

As you read “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” observe how Coleridge reworks the traditional ballad form and creates a poem of rare beauty and complexity.

## ● READING STRATEGY: READING NARRATIVE POETRY

Like all ballads, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is a **narrative poem**—a poem that tells a story. It has many of the basic elements of a prose story: setting, characters, point of view, plot, conflict, and theme. As you read the poem, use a chart like the one shown to take notes about each of these elements. Focus on the main story, not on the frame story. Additionally, use the red marginal notes, which were written by Coleridge, to help you clarify plot developments.

<i>“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”</i>
<i>Setting (Time/Place):</i>
<i>Characters:</i>
<i>Point of View:</i>
<i>Plot and Major Conflict:</i>
<i>Theme:</i>



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

## *How can GUILT enslave us?*

The famous expression “like an albatross around my neck” stems from Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” It is often used to describe feelings of guilt that weigh heavily on a person. Have you ever felt burdened by guilt?

**QUICKWRITE** Think about a time when you felt ashamed about something you had done. For example, maybe you lost your brother’s favorite CD or forgot your best friend’s birthday. How did guilt affect you? Write a paragraph to describe the situation.



# THE RIME OF THE Ancient Mariner

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

## Argument

*How a Ship, having first sailed to the Equator, was driven by storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; how the Ancient Mariner cruelly and in contempt of the laws of hospitality killed a Seabird and how he was followed by many strange Judgments; and in what manner he came back to his own Country.*

## PART I

It is an ancient Mariner,  
And he stoppeth one of three.  
“By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,  
Now wherefore stopp’st thou me?

*An ancient Mariner meeteth three Gallants bidden to a wedding feast, and detaineth one.*

4 wherefore: why.

5 The Bridegroom’s doors are opened wide,  
And I am next of kin;  
The guests are met, the feast is set:  
May’st hear the merry din.” A

## A LITERARY BALLAD

Based on lines 5–8, identify the length and rhyme scheme of a traditional ballad stanza.

He holds him with his skinny hand,  
10 “There was a ship,” quoth he.  
“Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!”  
Eftsoons his hand dropped he.

12 eftsoons: quickly.

He holds him with his glittering eye—  
The Wedding-Guest stood still,  
15 And listens like a three years’ child:  
The Mariner hath his will.

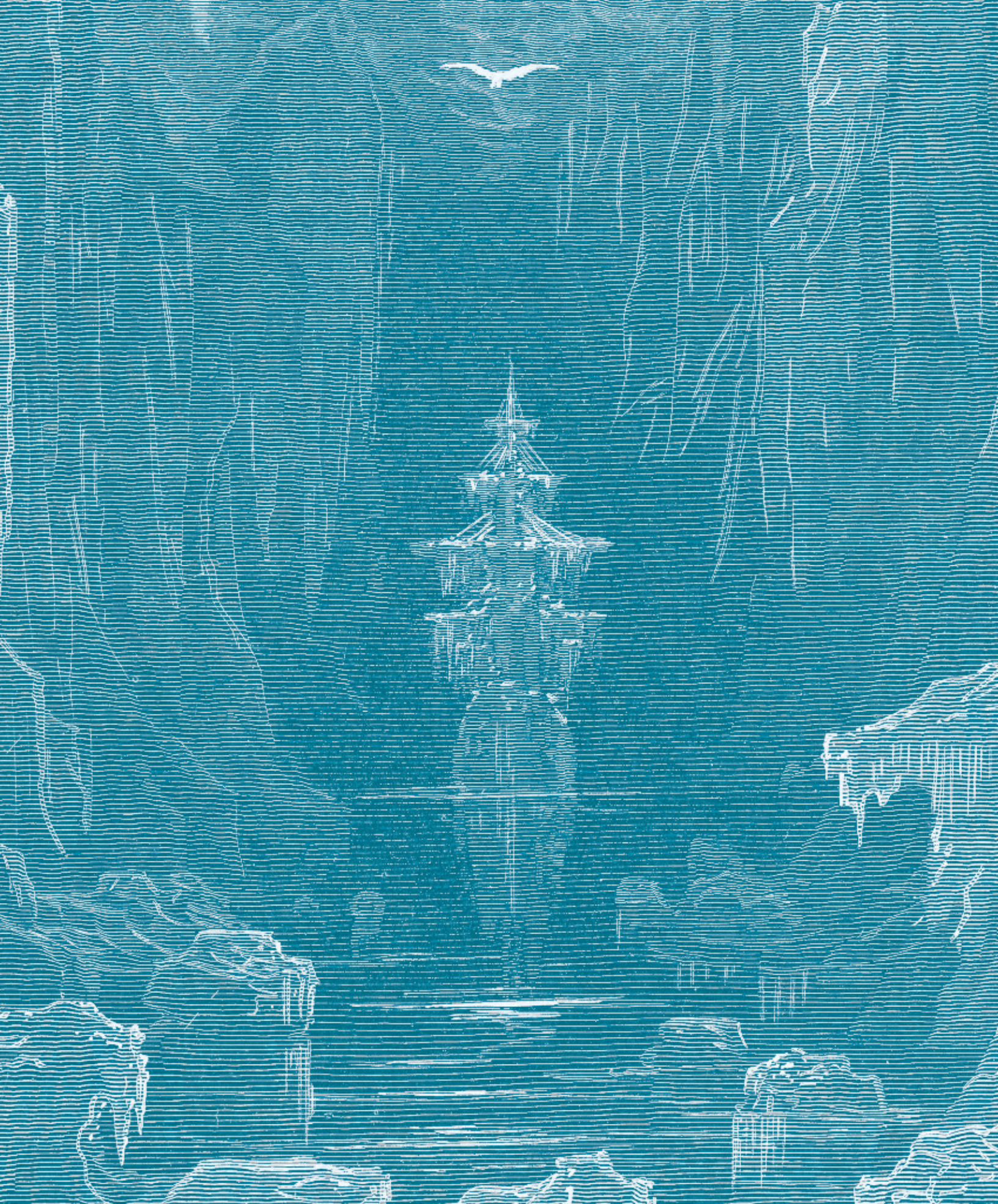
*The Wedding-Guest is spellbound by the eye of the old seafaring man, and constrained to hear his tale.*

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:  
He cannot choose but hear;  
And thus spake on that ancient man,  
20 The bright-eyed Mariner.

## Analyze Visuals ►

Describe the mood conveyed by this engraving. What details contribute to this mood?







“The ship was cheered, the harbor cleared,  
Merrily did we drop  
Below the kirk, below the hill,  
Below the lighthouse top.

25 The Sun came up upon the left,  
Out of the sea came he!  
And he shone bright, and on the right  
Went down into the sea.

Higher and higher every day,  
30 Till over the mast at noon—”  
The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,  
For he heard the loud bassoon.

The bride hath paced into the hall,  
Red as a rose is she;  
35 Nodding their heads before her goes  
The merry minstrelsy.

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,  
Yet he cannot choose but hear;  
And thus spake on that ancient man,  
40 The bright-eyed Mariner.

“And now the Storm-blast came, and he  
Was tyrannous and strong;  
He struck with his o’ertaking wings,  
And chased us south along.

45 With sloping masts and dipping prow,  
As who pursued with yell and blow  
Still treads the shadow of his foe,  
And forward bends his head,  
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,  
50 And southward aye we fled. **B**

And now there came both mist and snow,  
And it grew wondrous cold:  
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,  
As green as emerald.

55 And through the drifts the snowy clifts  
Did send a dismal sheen:  
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—  
The ice was all between.

**23 kirk:** church.

*The Mariner tells how the ship sailed southward with a good wind and fair weather, till it reached the Line.*

**30 over . . . noon:** The ship has reached the equator, or “Line.”

*The Wedding-Guest heareth the bridal music; but the Mariner continueth his tale.*

**36 minstrelsy:** group of musicians.

*The ship driven by a storm toward the South Pole.*

#### **B NARRATIVE POETRY**

Compare the sailing conditions described in lines 21–28 and 41–50. In what way does the poem’s **setting** change?

*The land of ice, and of fearful sounds where no living thing was to be seen.*

**55 clifts:** cliffs.

**57 ken:** perceive.



The ice was here, the ice was there,  
60 The ice was all around:  
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,  
Like noises in a swound!

At length did cross an Albatross,  
Thorough the fog it came;  
65 As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name.

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,  
And round and round it flew.  
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;  
70 The helmsman steered us through!

And a good south wind sprung up behind;  
The Albatross did follow,  
And every day, for food or play,  
Came to the mariners' hollo!

75 In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,  
It perched for vespers nine;  
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,  
Glimmered the white moonshine."

**62 swound:** swoon; fainting fit.

*Till a great sea bird, called the Albatross, came through the snow-fog, and was received with great joy and hospitality.*

**63 Albatross** (äl'bə-trôs'): a large web-footed ocean bird common in the Southern Hemisphere.

*And lo! the Albatross proveth a bird of good omen, and followeth the ship as it returned northward through fog and floating ice.*

**74 hollo** (hä'lō): call.

**75 shroud:** one of the ropes that support a ship's mast.

**76 vespers nine:** nine evenings.





“God save thee, ancient Mariner,  
80 From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—  
Why look’st thou so?”—With my crossbow  
I shot the Albatross. **C**

## PART II

The Sun now rose upon the right:  
Out of the sea came he,  
85 Still hid in mist, and on the left  
Went down into the sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,  
But no sweet bird did follow,  
Nor any day for food or play  
90 Came to the mariners’ hollo!

And I had done a hellish thing,  
And it would work’em woe:  
For all averred I had killed the bird  
That made the breeze to blow.  
95 Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,  
That made the breeze to blow!

Nor dim nor red, like God’s own head,  
The glorious Sun uprist:  
Then all averred I had killed the bird  
100 That brought the fog and mist.  
’Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,  
That bring the fog and mist.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,  
The furrow followed free;  
105 We were the first that ever burst  
Into that silent sea.

Down dropped the breeze, the sails dropped down,  
’Twas sad as sad could be;  
And we did speak only to break  
110 The silence of the sea!

All in a hot and copper sky,  
The bloody Sun, at noon,  
Right up above the mast did stand,  
No bigger than the Moon.

*The ancient Mariner inhospitably  
killeth the pious bird of good omen.*

### **C** NARRATIVE POETRY

Summarize the **plot developments** of the poem to this point. What **conflicts** might arise because of the Mariner’s action?

**83 The Sun . . . right:** The rising of the sun on the right indicates that the ship is now heading northward.

*His shipmates cry out against the  
ancient Mariner, for killing the bird  
of good luck.*

**93 averred** (ə-vûrd’): declared; asserted.

*But when the fog cleared off, they  
justify the same, and thus make  
themselves accomplices in the crime.*

**98 uprist:** rose.

*The fair breeze continues; the ship  
enters the Pacific Ocean, and sails  
northward, even till it reaches the  
Line.*

*The ship hath been suddenly  
becalmed.*



115 Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;  
As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, everywhere,  
120 And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water, everywhere  
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!  
That ever this should be!  
125 Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs  
Upon the slimy sea. **D**

About, about, in reel and rout  
The death-fires danced at night;  
The water, like a witch's oils,  
130 Burnt green, and blue, and white.

And some in dreams assuréd were  
Of the Spirit that plagued us so;  
Nine fathom deep he had followed us  
From the land of mist and snow.  
135 And every tongue, through utter drought,  
Was withered at the root;  
We could not speak, no more than if  
We had been choked with soot.

Ah! well a-day! what evil looks  
140 Had I from old and young!  
Instead of the cross, the Albatross  
About my neck was hung.

### PART III

There passed a weary time. Each throat  
Was parched, and glazed each eye.  
145 A weary time! a weary time!  
How glazed each weary eye!  
When, looking westward, I beheld  
A something in the sky.

*And the Albatross begins to be avenged.*

#### **D LITERARY BALLAD**

Reread lines 123–126, identifying examples of **onomatopoeia**, or words whose sounds echo their meanings. In what way do these words contribute to the mood of the scene?

**127 in reel and rout:** with dizzying, unpredictable motion.

**128 death-fires:** dim flamelike lights reportedly seen above decomposing matter.

*A Spirit had followed them; one of the invisible inhabitants of this planet, neither departed souls nor angels; concerning whom the learned Jew, Josephus, and the Platonic Constantinopolitan, Michael Psellus, may be consulted. They are very numerous, and there is no climate or element without one or more.*

**133 nine fathom:** 54 feet.

*The shipmates, in their sore distress, would fain throw the whole guilt on the ancient Mariner: in sign whereof they hang the dead sea bird round his neck.*

*The ancient Mariner beholdeth a sign in the element afar off.*

At first it seemed a little speck,  
150 And then it seemed a mist;  
It moved and moved, and took at last  
A certain shape, I wist.

**152 wist:** perceived; discerned.

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!  
And still it neared and neared:  
155 As if it dodged a water-sprite,  
It plunged, and tacked and veered.

**155 water sprite:** a mythical being living in water.

**156 tacked and veered:** zigzagged.

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,  
We could nor laugh nor wail;  
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!  
160 I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,  
And cried, A sail! a sail!

*At its nearer approach, it seemeth him to be a ship; and at a dear ransom he freeth his speech from the bonds of thirst.*

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,  
Agape they heard me call:  
Gramercy! they for joy did grin,  
165 And all at once their breath drew in,  
As they were drinking all.

*A flash of joy;*

**164 gramercy** (grə-mûr'sê): an exclamation of gratitude.

See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!  
Hither to work us weal—  
Without a breeze, without a tide,  
170 She steadies with upright keel!

*And horror follows. For can it be a ship that comes onward without wind or tide?*

**168 hither to work us weal:** in this direction to help us.

The western wave was all aflame,  
The day was wellnigh done!  
Almost upon the western wave  
Rested the broad, bright Sun;  
175 When that strange shape drove suddenly  
Betwixt us and the Sun.

**171 The western wave was all aflame:** The water to the west was reflecting the light of the setting sun.

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars  
(Heaven's Mother send us grace!),  
As if through a dungeon-grate he peered  
180 With broad and burning face.

*It seemeth him but the skeleton of a ship.*

**178 Heaven's Mother:** the Virgin Mary.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)  
How fast she nears and nears!  
Are those her sails that glance in the Sun,  
Like restless gossameres?

**184 gossameres** (gös'ə-mêrz'): cobwebs floating in the air.





185 Are those her ribs through which the Sun  
Did peer, as through a grate?  
And is that Woman all her crew?  
Is that a Death? and are there two?  
Is Death that Woman's mate?

*And its ribs are seen as bars on the face of the setting Sun. The Specter-Woman and her Deathmate, and no other on board the skeleton ship.*

190 Her lips were red, her looks were free,  
Her locks were yellow as gold:  
Her skin was as white as leprosy,  
The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she,  
Who thicks man's blood with cold.

*Like vessel, like crew!*

**192 leprosy** (lĕp'rə-sē): a disease marked by spreading patches of discoloration on the skin and by deformities of the limbs and other parts of the body.

195 The naked hulk alongside came,  
And the twain were casting dice;  
"The game is done! I've won! I've won!"  
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

*Death and Life-in-Death have diced for the ship's crew, and she (the latter) winneth the ancient Mariner.*

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:  
200 At one stride comes the dark;  
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,  
Off shot the spectre-bark.

*No twilight within the courts of the Sun.*

**202 spectre-bark:** ghost ship.

We listened and looked sideways up!  
 Fear at my heart, as at a cup,  
 205 My life-blood seemed to sip!  
 The stars were dim, and thick the night,  
 The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white;  
 From the sails the dew did drip—  
 Till clomb above the eastern bar  
 210 The hornéd Moon, with one bright star  
 Within the nether tip.

*At the rising of the Moon,*

**209 clomb** (klōm): climbed.

**210 hornéd Moon:** crescent moon.

One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,  
 Too quick for groan or sigh,  
 Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,  
 215 And cursed me with his eye.

*One after another,*

Four times fifty living men  
 (And I heard nor sigh nor groan),  
 With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,  
 They dropped down one by one.

*His shipmates drop down dead.*

220 The souls did from their bodies fly—  
 They fled to bliss or woe!  
 And every soul, it passed me by  
 Like the whizz of my crossbow!

*But Life-in-Death begins her work  
 on the ancient Mariner.*

## PART IV

“I fear thee, ancient Mariner!  
 225 I fear thy skinny hand!  
 And thou art long, and lank, and brown,  
 As is the ribbed sea-sand.

*The Wedding-Guest feareth that a  
 Spirit is talking to him;*

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,  
 And thy skinny hand so brown.”—  
 230 Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!  
 This body dropped not down.

*But the ancient Mariner assureth him  
 of his bodily life, and proceedeth to  
 relate his horrible penance.*

Alone, alone, all, all alone  
 Alone on a wide, wide sea!  
 And never a saint took pity on  
 235 My soul in agony. **E**

### **E LITERARY BALLAD**

Storytellers of traditional ballads often repeated words to help make their works memorable. What ideas in lines 232–235 does Coleridge want his readers to remember?

The many men, so beautiful!  
 And they all dead did lie:  
 And a thousand thousand slimy things  
 Lived on; and so did I.

*He despiseth the creatures of the  
 calm,*



240 I looked upon the rotting sea,  
And drew my eyes away;  
I looked upon the rotting deck,  
And there the dead men lay.

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;  
245 But or ever a prayer had gushed,  
A wicked whisper came, and made  
My heart as dry as dust. **F**

I closed my lids, and kept them close,  
And the balls like pulses beat;  
250 But the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky,  
Lay like a load on my weary eye,  
And the dead were at my feet.

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,  
Nor rot nor reek did they:  
255 The look with which they looked on me  
Had never passed away.

An orphan's curse would drag to hell  
A spirit from on high;  
But oh! more horrible than that  
260 Is the curse in a dead man's eye!  
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,  
And yet I could not die.

The moving Moon went up the sky,  
And nowhere did abide;  
265 Softly she was going up,  
And a star or two beside—

Her beams bemoaned the sultry main,  
Like April hoar-frost spread;  
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,  
270 The charmed water burnt alway  
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,  
I watched the water-snakes:  
They moved in tracks of shining white,  
275 And when they reared, the elfish light  
Fell off in hoary flakes.

*And envieth that they should live, and  
so many lie dead.*

#### **F** NARRATIVE POETRY

According to lines 244–247,  
what is the Mariner unable to  
do? Explain what this suggests  
about his **character**.

249 **balls**: eyeballs.

*But the curse liveth for him in the eye  
of the dead men.*

*In his loneliness and fixedness he  
yearneth towards the journeying  
Moon, and the stars that still  
sojourn, yet still move onward; and  
everywhere the blue sky belongs to  
them, and is their appointed rest,  
and their native country and their  
own natural homes, which they  
enter unannounced, as lords that  
are certainly expected and yet there  
is a silent joy at their arrival.*

267 **bemoaned** . . . **main**: scornfully  
defied the hot ocean (because the  
moon's pale light made the sea  
appear cool).

268 **hoar-frost**: frozen dew.

*By the light of the Moon he beholdeth  
God's creatures of the great calm.*

276 **fell off in hoary flakes**: glittered  
on water droplets falling from the  
snakes.

Within the shadow of the ship  
I watched their rich attire:  
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,  
280 They coiled and swam; and every track  
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
285 And I blessed them unaware:  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I blessed them unaware.

The selfsame moment I could pray;  
And from my neck so free  
290 The Albatross fell off, and sank  
Like lead into the sea. **G**

## PART V

O sleep! it is a gentle thing,  
Beloved from pole to pole!  
To Mary Queen the praise be given!  
295 She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,  
That slid into my soul.

The silly buckets on the deck,  
That had so long remained,  
I dreamt that they were filled with dew;  
300 And when I awoke, it rained.

My lips were wet, my throat was cold.  
My garments all were dank;  
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,  
And still my body drank.

305 I moved, and could not feel my limbs:  
I was so light—almost  
I thought that I had died in sleep,  
And was a blessed ghost.

And soon I heard a roaring wind:  
310 It did not come anear;  
But with its sound it shook the sails,  
That were so thin and sere.

*Their beauty and their happiness.*

*He blesseth them in his heart.*

*The spell begins to break.*

### **G** NARRATIVE POETRY

Reread lines 272–291.

Explain why the spell begins to break at this point. What does this event suggest about the relationship between humans, nature, and the supernatural?

294 Mary Queen: the Virgin Mary.

*By grace of the holy Mother, the ancient Mariner is refreshed with rain.*

### Language Coach

**Synonyms** Words with the same or nearly the same meaning are synonyms. Which word in line 302 is a synonym for *damp*? What word in line 300 gives you a clue?

*He heareth sounds and seeth strange sights and commotions in the sky and the element.*

312 sere (sîr): dry.



The upper air burst into life;  
 And a hundred fire-flags sheen;  
 315 To and fro they were hurried about!  
 And to and fro, and in and out,  
 The wan stars danced between.

**314 fire-flags:** probably the aurora australis, or southern lights—waving bands of light in the night sky; **sheen:** bright.

**317 wan:** pale.

And the coming wind did roar more loud,  
 And the sails did sigh like sedge;  
 320 And the rain poured down from one black cloud;  
 The Moon was at its edge.

**319 sedge:** tall grasslike plants that make a rustling sound when blown by the wind.

The thick black cloud was cleft, and still  
 The Moon was at its side;  
 Like waters shot from some high crag,  
 325 The lightning fell with never a jag,  
 A river steep and wide.

The loud wind never reached the ship,  
 Yet now the ship moved on!  
 Beneath the lightning and the Moon  
 330 The dead men gave a groan.

*The bodies of the ship's crew are inspirited, and the ship moves on;*

They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,  
 Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;  
 It had been strange, even in a dream,  
 To have seen those dead men rise.

335 The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;  
 Yet never a breeze up-blew;  
 The mariners all 'gan work the ropes,  
 Where they were wont to do;  
 They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—  
 340 We were a ghastly crew.

**338 wont:** accustomed.

The body of my brother's son  
 Stood by me, knee to knee:  
 The body and I pulled at one rope,  
 But he said naught to me. **H**

345 "I fear thee, ancient Mariner!"  
 Be calm, thou Wedding-Guest:  
 'Twas not those souls that fled in pain,  
 Which to their corpses came again,  
 But a troop of spirits blest:

## **H NARRATIVE POETRY**

In a narrative, the **climax** is the moment of greatest interest and intensity. What shocking discovery does the Mariner make in lines 331–344?

*But not by the souls of the men, nor by demons of earth or middle air, but by a blessed troop of angelic spirits, sent down by the invocation of the guardian saint.*

**348 corpses:** bodies.



350 For when it dawned—they dropped their arms,  
And clustered round the mast;  
Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,  
And from their bodies passed.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,  
355 Then darted to the Sun;  
Slowly the sounds came back again,  
Now mixed, now one by one.

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky  
I heard the skylark sing;  
360 Sometimes all little birds that are,  
How they seemed to fill the sea and air  
With their sweet jargoning!

362 jargoning: warbling.

And now 'twas like all instruments,  
Now like a lonely flute;  
365 And now it is an angel's song,  
That makes the Heavens be mute.



It ceased; yet still the sails made on  
A pleasant noise till noon,  
A noise like of a hidden brook  
370 In the leafy month of June,  
That to the sleeping woods all night  
Singeth a quiet tune.

Till noon we quietly sailed on,  
Yet never a breeze did breathe:  
375 Slowly and smoothly went the ship,  
Moved onward from beneath.

Under the keel nine fathom deep,  
From the land of mist and snow,  
The Spirit slid: and it was he  
380 That made the ship to go.  
The sails at noon left off their tune,  
And the ship stood still also.

The Sun, right up above the mast,  
Had fixed her to the ocean:  
385 But in a minute she 'gan stir,  
With a short uneasy motion—  
Backwards and forwards half her length  
With a short uneasy motion.

Then like a pawing horse let go,  
390 She made a sudden bound:  
It flung the blood into my head,  
And I fell down in a swoond. ❶

How long in that same fit I lay,  
I have not to declare;  
395 But ere my living life returned,  
I heard, and in my soul discerned  
Two voices in the air.

“Is it he?” quoth one, “is this the man?  
By Him who died on cross,  
400 With his cruel bow he laid full low  
The harmless Albatross.

The Spirit who bideth by himself  
In the land of mist and snow,  
He loved the bird that loved the man  
405 Who shot him with his bow.”

*The lonesome Spirit from the South Pole carries on the ship as far as the Line, in obedience to the angelic troop, but still requireth vengeance.*

#### ❶ LITERARY BALLAD

Reread lines 377–392. What **supernatural** element does Coleridge introduce to enhance the sensational nature of his tale?

**394 have not:** am not able.

*The Polar Spirit's fellow demons, the invisible inhabitants of the element, take part in his wrong; and two of them relate, one to the other, that penance long and heavy for the ancient Mariner hath been accorded to the Polar Spirit, who returneth southward.*

**399 Him who died on cross:** Jesus Christ.

The other was a softer voice,  
As soft as honey-dew:  
Quoth he, “The man hath penance done,  
And penance more will do.”

**408 penance** (pěn’əns): suffering in repayment for a sin.

## PART VI

*First Voice:*

410 “But tell me, tell me! speak again,  
Thy soft response renewing—  
What makes that ship drive on so fast?  
What is the Ocean doing?”

*Second Voice:*

“Still as a slave before his lord,  
415 The Ocean hath no blast;  
His great bright eye most silently  
Up to the Moon is cast—

If he may know which way to go;  
For she guides him smooth or grim.  
420 See, brother, see! how graciously  
She looketh down on him.”

*First Voice:*

“But why drives on that ship so fast,  
Without or wave or wind?”

*Second Voice:*

“The air is cut away before,  
425 And closes from behind.

Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high!  
Or we shall be belated:  
For slow and slow that ship will go,  
When the Mariner’s trance is abated.” **J**

430 I woke, and we were sailing on  
As in a gentle weather:  
’Twas night, calm night, the Moon was high;  
The dead men stood together.

All stood together on the deck,  
435 For a charnel-dungeon fitter:  
All fixed on me their stony eyes,  
That in the Moon did glitter.

*The Mariner hath been cast into a trance; for the angelic power causeth the vessel to drive northward faster than human life could endure.*

### **J LITERARY BALLAD**

Ballads often feature **dialogue**, which adds liveliness and conveys key information. In what ways does the dialogue in lines 410–429 conform to these conventions?

*The supernatural motion is retarded; the Mariner awakes, and his penance begins anew.*

**435 For . . . fitter:** more suitable for a burial vault.



The pang, the curse, with which they died,  
Had never passed away:  
440 I could not draw my eyes from theirs,  
Nor turn them up to pray.

And now this spell was snapped: once more  
I viewed the ocean green,  
And looked far forth, yet little saw  
445 Of what had else been seen—

Like one that on a lonesome road  
Doth walk in fear and dread,  
And having once turned round, walks on,  
And turns no more his head;  
450 Because he knows a frightful fiend  
Doth close behind him tread.

But soon there breathed a wind on me,  
Nor sound nor motion made:  
Its path was not upon the sea,  
455 In ripple or in shade.

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek  
Like a meadow-gale of spring—  
It mingled strangely with my fears,  
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

460 Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,  
Yet she sailed softly too:  
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—  
On me alone it blew. **K**

O dream of joy! is this indeed  
465 The lighthouse top I see?  
Is this the hill? is this the kirk?  
Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o'er the harbor-bar,  
And I with sobs did pray—  
470 O let me be awake, my God!  
Or let me sleep alway.

The harbor-bay was clear as glass,  
So smoothly it was strewn!  
And on the bay the moonlight lay,  
475 And the shadow of the Moon.

*The curse is finally expiated.*

450 **fiend:** demon.

**K LITERARY BALLAD**

Read aloud lines 460–463, identifying examples of **alliteration**, or the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words. What effect does this technique create?

*And the ancient Mariner beholdeth  
his native country.*

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less  
That stands above the rock:  
The moonlight steeped in silentness  
The steady weathercock.

**479 weathercock:** weathervane.

480 And the bay was white with silent light  
Till rising from the same,  
Full many shapes, that shadows were,  
In crimson colors came.

*The angelic spirits leave the dead  
bodies,*

A little distance from the prow  
485 Those crimson shadows were:  
I turned my eyes upon the deck—  
O Christ! what saw I there!

*And appear in their own forms  
of light.*

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,  
And, by the holy rood!  
490 A man all light, a seraph-man,  
On every corse there stood.

**489 the holy rood** (rōōd): the cross  
on which Christ was crucified.

**490 seraph** (sēr'əf) **man:** angel.

This seraph-band, each waved his hand:  
It was a heavenly sight!  
They stood as signals to the land,  
495 Each one a lovely light;

This seraph-band, each waved his hand,  
No voice did they impart—  
No voice; but O, the silence sank  
Like music on my heart.

500 But soon I heard the dash of oars,  
I heard the Pilot's cheer;  
My head was turned perforce away,  
And I saw a boat appear.

**502 perforce:** of necessity.

The Pilot and the Pilot's boy,  
505 I heard them coming fast:  
Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy  
The dead men could not blast.

**507 blast:** destroy.



I saw a third—I heard his voice:  
It is the Hermit good!  
510 He singeth loud his godly hymns  
That he makes in the wood.  
He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away  
The Albatross's blood.

## PART VII

This hermit good lives in that wood  
515 Which slopes down to the sea.  
How loudly his sweet voice he rears!  
He loves to talk with marineres  
That come from a far countree.

He kneels at morn, and noon, and eve—  
520 He hath a cushion plump.  
It is the moss that wholly hides  
The rotted old oak-stump.

The skiff-boat neared: I heard them talk,  
“Why, this is strange, I trow!  
525 Where are those lights so many and fair,  
That signal made but now?”

“Strange, by my faith!” the Hermit said—  
“And they answered not our cheer!  
The planks look warped! and see those sails,  
530 How thin they are and sere!  
I never saw aught like to them,  
Unless perchance it were  
Brown skeletons of leaves that lag  
My forest-brook along;  
535 When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,  
And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,  
That cats the she-wolf's young.”

“Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look—  
(The Pilot made reply)  
540 I am a-fear'd.”—“Push on, push on!”  
Said the Hermit cheerily.

512 **shrieve** (shrēv): absolve from sin; pardon.

*The Hermit of the Wood*

### Language Coach

**Multiple Meanings** The verb *rears* can mean “brings up” (children, for example); “rises up” (in anger, for example); or simply “raises.” What does it mean in line 516? Hint: Rearrange this line as “How loudly he rears his sweet voice!”

524 **trow**: believe.

*Approacheth the ship with wonder.*

535 **tod**: clump.

The boat came closer to the ship,  
But I nor spake nor stirred;  
The boat came close beneath the ship,  
545 And straight a sound was heard.

Under the water it rumbled on  
Still louder and more dread:  
It reached the ship, it split the bay;  
The ship went down like lead.

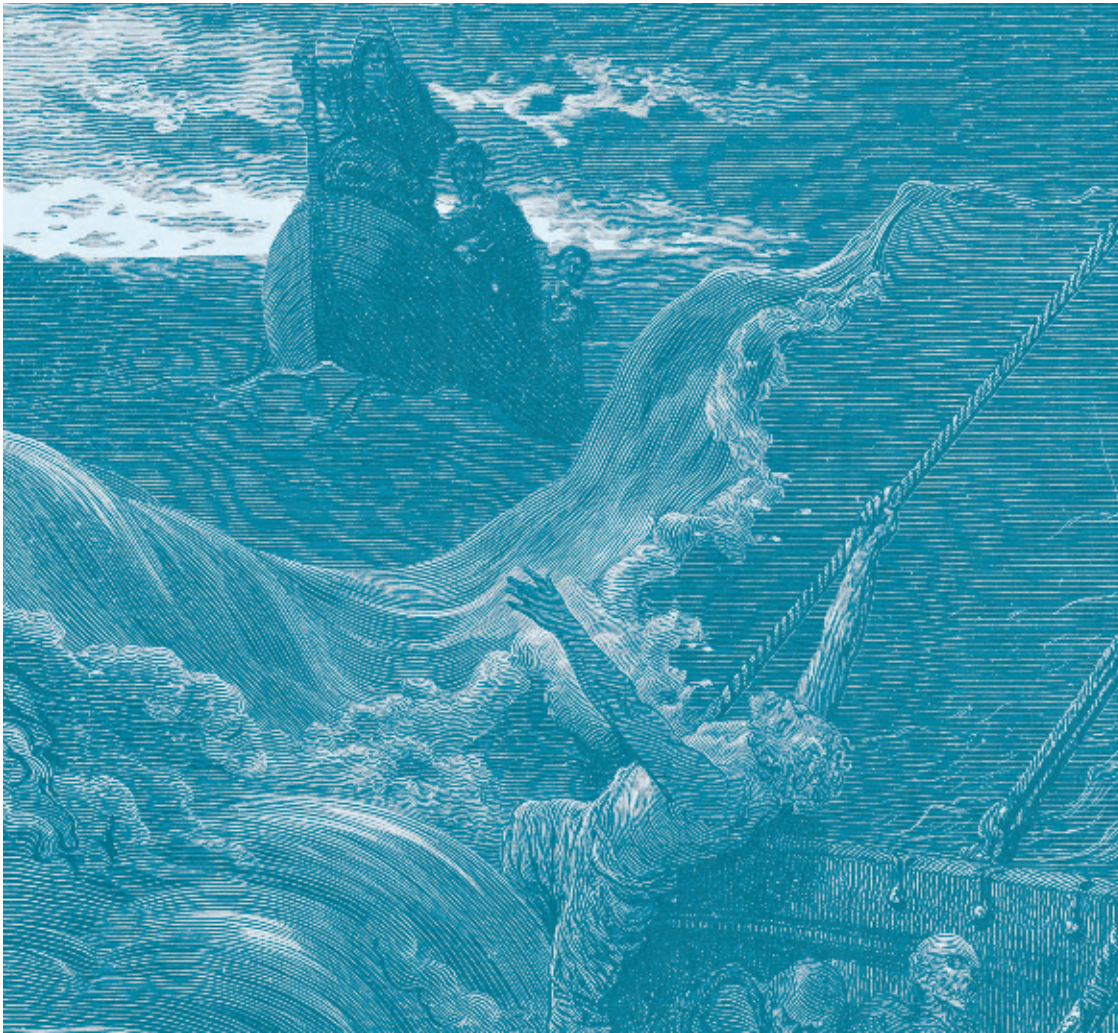
*The ship suddenly sinketh.*

550 Stunned by that loud and dreadful sound,  
Which sky and ocean smote,  
Like one that hath been seven days drowned  
My body lay afloat;  
But swift as dreams, myself I found  
555 Within the Pilot's boat.  
Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,  
The boat spun round and round;  
And all was still, save that the hill  
Was telling of the sound.

551 smote: struck.

*The ancient Mariner is saved  
in the Pilot's boat.*

559 telling of: echoing.





560 I moved my lips—the Pilot shrieked  
And fell down in a fit;  
The holy Hermit raised his eyes,  
And prayed where he did sit.

I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,  
565 Who now doth crazy go,  
Laughed loud and long, and all the while  
His eyes went to and fro.  
“Ha! ha!” quoth he, “full plain I see  
The Devil knows how to row.”

570 And now, all in my own countree,  
I stood on the firm land!  
The Hermit stepped forth from the boat,  
And scarcely he could stand. **L**

“O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!”  
575 The Hermit crossed his brow.  
“Say quick,” quoth he, “I bid thee say—  
What manner of man art thou?”

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched  
With a woeful agony,  
580 Which forced me to begin my tale;  
And then it left me free.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,  
That agony returns:  
And till my ghastly tale is told,  
585 This heart within me burns.

I pass, like night, from land to land;  
I have strange power of speech;  
That moment that his face I see,  
I know the man that must hear me:  
590 To him my tale I teach.

What loud uproar bursts from that door!  
The wedding-guests are there:  
But in the garden-bower the bride  
And bride-maids singing are:  
595 And hark, the little vesper bell,  
Which biddeth me to prayer!

### **L LITERARY BALLAD**

Identify several examples of **archaic language** in lines 564–573. What effect do these antiquated expressions help to create?

**575 crossed his brow:** made the sign of the cross on his forehead.

*The ancient Mariner earnestly entreateth the Hermit to shrieve him; and the penance of life falls on him.*

*And ever and anon throughout his future life an agony constraineth him to travel from land to land;*

O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been  
Alone on a wide, wide sea:  
So lonely 'twas, that God Himself  
600 Scarce seeméd there to be.

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,  
'Tis sweeter far to me,  
To walk together to the kirk  
With a goodly company!—

605 To walk together to the kirk,  
And all together pray,  
While each to his great Father bends,  
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,  
And youths and maidens gay!

610 Farewell, farewell! but this I tell  
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!  
He prayeth well, who loveth well  
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
615 All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all. **M**

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,  
Whose beard with age is hoar,  
620 Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest  
Turned from the bridegroom's door.

He went like one that hath been stunned,  
And is of sense forlorn:  
A sadder and a wiser man  
625 He rose the morrow morn.

## Language Coach

**Oral Fluency** Coleridge sometimes uses contractions to make a line fit the ballad meter, or rhythm. Reread lines 597-600 aloud. In line 599, *it was* becomes *'twas*. How does he alter a word in line 600 to complete the meter of that line?

607 his great Father: God.

*And to teach, by his own example,  
love and reverence to all things that  
God made and loveth.*

**M NARRATIVE POETRY**  
Express in your own words the thematic statement in lines 612–617.

619 hoar: gray.

## Comprehension

1. **Recall** In what ways does the albatross's arrival seem to affect the ship's voyage?
2. **Summarize** What happens to the rest of the crew after the Mariner kills the albatross?
3. **Clarify** Why does the albatross eventually fall from the Mariner's neck?
4. **Clarify** Why must the Mariner continue to tell his tale?



**READING 3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, graphics, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods.

## Literary Analysis

5. **Understand Narrative Poetry** Like short stories and novels, **narrative poems** often focus on characters who undergo major changes. Identify the character traits the Mariner exhibits early on in the poem. In what ways does he grow and change as the plot unfolds? Review the chart you created as you read to help you respond.
6. **Make Inferences** What are the consequences of the Mariner's being won by Life-in-Death (lines 190–198) rather than by Death?
7. **Identify Symbol** In literature, a **symbol** is a person, place, object, or activity that represents something beyond itself. What symbolic meaning might the albatross have in the poem? Cite evidence to support your answer.
8. **Make Judgments** Do you think that the punishment the Mariner experiences fits his crime? Explain your thoughts.
9. **Interpret Theme** What overall message, or **theme**, about guilt does the poem convey? Offer evidence to support your ideas.
10. **Analyze Literary Ballad** Review the conventions of the ballad form listed on page 217. Identify the characteristics of the traditional ballad that are present in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” What qualities distinguish this poem from traditional ballads? Give examples to support your observations.

## Literary Criticism

11. **Critical Interpretations** Decades after the publication of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” Coleridge observed that it had “too much” of a moral for a work of “pure imagination.” Do you agree or disagree with this view? Cite evidence from the poem to support your opinion.

*How can **GUILT** enslave us?*

Guilt is a feeling of self-reproach and self-condemnation that can dominate our thoughts. What are some ways people try to escape from guilt?