

## The Challenge of Modernism

### Selected Poetry

by T. S. Eliot

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML12-1116A



**READING 3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, figurative language, graphics, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods. **7** Analyze how the author's patterns of imagery, literary allusions, and conceits reveal theme, set tone, and create meaning in metaphors, passages, and literary works.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

T. S. Eliot . . .

- refused to publish his early work because he believed it mediocre.
- wrote the book that inspired the hit Broadway musical *Cats*.
- won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1948.

#### Meet the Author

### T. S. Eliot 1888–1965

Claimed by his native America as well as his adopted homeland of Britain, T. S. Eliot was one of the giants of 20th-century literature. With friend and fellow American poet Ezra Pound, Eliot ushered in the modernist movement, transforming how poetry was written and understood.

**Poet of Two Countries** Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, into a distinguished family with New England roots. Eliot's parents maintained close ties to New England, bringing their children each summer to Gloucester, Massachusetts. Later, Eliot remarked that as a child he did not feel as if he truly belonged in either New England or the Midwest.

After attending Harvard University, Eliot pursued graduate work in philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris, at Harvard, and at Oxford University. However, he never earned his doctoral degree. In 1915, he fell in love with a vivacious English beauty named Vivien Haigh-Wood. He married Vivien just a few months later, much to the consternation of his parents, who were deeply troubled by her history of mental illness. Henceforth, Eliot would make his home in England.

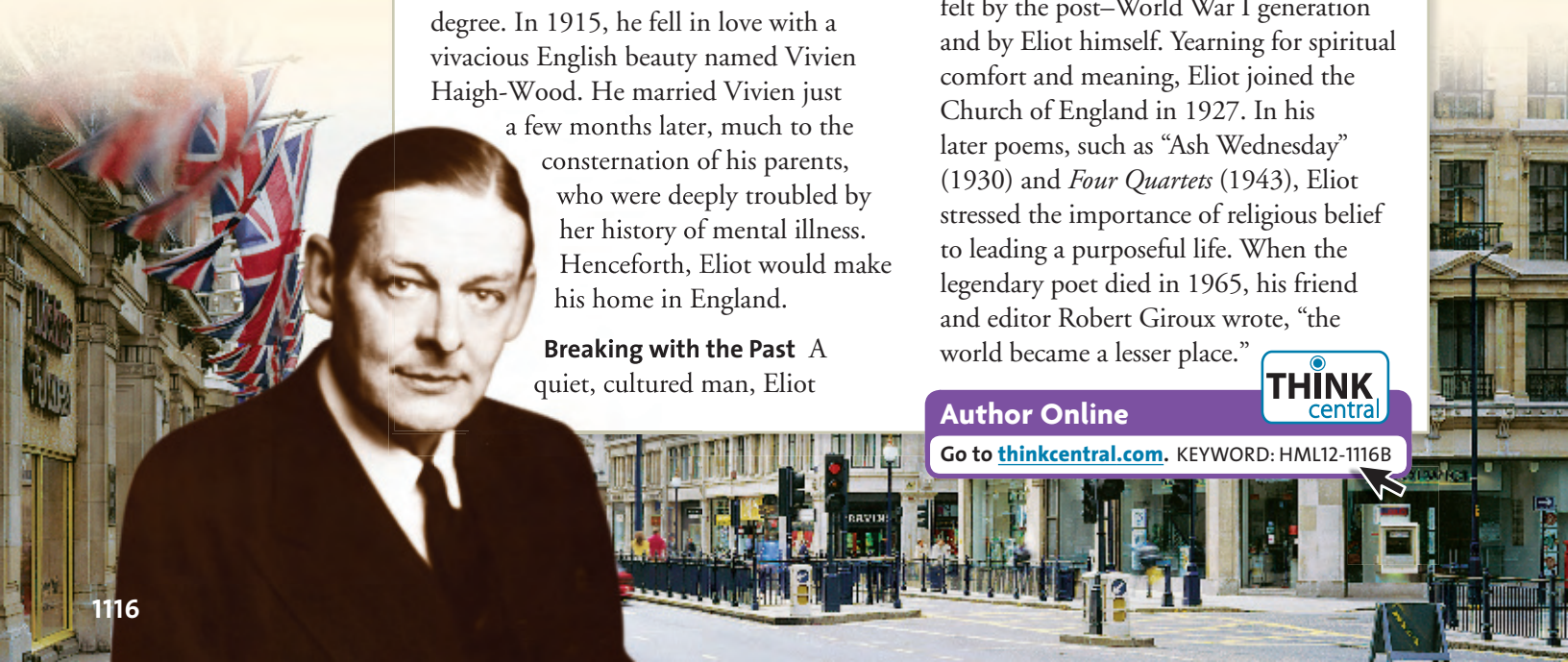
**Breaking with the Past** A quiet, cultured man, Eliot

supported himself and his wife by working successively as a teacher, a bank clerk, and an editor while trying to make a name for himself as a writer. In 1917, with Ezra Pound's support, Eliot published a collection of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, which explored the alienating effects of modern life. Though now considered a cornerstone of the modernist movement, the volume received mixed reviews when it first appeared. Many critics were put off by Eliot's vivid depictions of the ugly realities of urban life and by his use of fragmentary images and colloquial language.

**Modernist Master** With the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922, Eliot's reputation as a pre-eminent poet was solidified. Completed as his marriage was falling apart, the poem expresses the emotional pain and spiritual emptiness felt by the post–World War I generation and by Eliot himself. Yearning for spiritual comfort and meaning, Eliot joined the Church of England in 1927. In his later poems, such as “Ash Wednesday” (1930) and *Four Quartets* (1943), Eliot stressed the importance of religious belief to leading a purposeful life. When the legendary poet died in 1965, his friend and editor Robert Giroux wrote, “the world became a lesser place.”

Author Online

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## LITERARY ANALYSIS: STYLE

Credited with ushering in a new era of poetry, T. S. Eliot shattered the poetic conventions of his day. Eliot's revolutionary **style**—his individual way of communicating ideas—has inspired both praise and puzzlement for almost a century. Key elements of Eliot's poetic style include

- a frequent use of free verse, in which the rhythms fall into no fixed pattern
- the use of colloquial language, including slang and references to popular culture
- the conveying of ideas by complex figurative language, images, symbols, and allusions rather than by explicit statements

Eliot's tone is another important element of his style. Many of his poems have a tone of disillusionment or alienation, reflecting his despair at what he saw as the decline of Western civilization. "The Naming of Cats," written after Eliot came to terms with the modern age, shows the poet's witty, whimsical side.

As you read Eliot's poetry, notice examples of these stylistic elements.

## READING STRATEGY: READING MODERN VERSE

Eliot's modernist poetry, like much modern art, can be hard to understand at first. Eliot often presents a patchwork of images, symbols, and allusions; readers must supply the connections themselves. The following guidelines can help you interpret Eliot's poems:

- Read each poem aloud, pausing between sections and lingering over images you find particularly striking.
- Try paraphrasing lines you find puzzling.
- Use the sidenotes to decipher unfamiliar allusions.

For "Preludes" and "The Hollow Men," use a chart like the one shown to jot down the central image or idea conveyed in each stanza.

Poem / Stanza	Central Image or Idea
"Preludes," stanza 1	The speaker describes a lonely, rundown, working-class setting—this modern environment is terribly bleak



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

# Is the world FALLING APART?

Once in a while, an event takes place that makes people feel as if their world is in danger of disintegration. For T. S. Eliot and his contemporaries, World War I was an event of this kind. One of the bloodiest conflicts of all time, the war seemed to them a total breakdown of Western civilization. In two of the poems that follow, Eliot conveys the alienation and despair that people felt in the wake of this catastrophe.

**QUICKWRITE** Think about events—such as wars, terrorist attacks, or natural disasters—that have shaken entire nations. Choose one event and describe how it altered the lives of those affected. What changes in values or perceptions does such an act cause? How might it make people fear society's disintegration?



# Preludes

T. S. Eliot

## I

The winter evening settles down  
With smell of steaks in passageways.  
Six o'clock.  
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.  
5 And now a gusty shower wraps  
The grimy scraps  
Of withered leaves about your feet  
And newspapers from vacant lots;  
The showers beat  
10 On broken blinds and chimney-pots,  
And at the corner of the street  
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.  
And then the lighting of the lamps. **A**

## II

The morning comes to consciousness  
15 Of faint stale smells of beer  
From the sawdust-trampled street  
With all its muddy feet that press  
To early coffee-stands.  
With the other masquerades  
20 That time resumes,  
One thinks of all the hands  
That are raising dingy shades  
In a thousand furnished rooms.

## III

You tossed a blanket from the bed,  
25 You lay upon your back, and waited;  
You dozed, and watched the night revealing  
The thousand sordid images  
Of which your soul was constituted;  
They flickered against the ceiling.

**2 steaks:** here, cheap cuts from low-grade beef, once a common working-class food.

### **A READING MODERN VERSE**

Which images in the first stanza create the most vivid impression? Explain why.

**18 early coffee-stands:** stands of vendors who cater to early-morning pedestrians.

**23 furnished rooms:** one-room apartments with furniture included, usually cheap and rundown.

- 30 And when all the world came back  
And the light crept up between the shutters  
And you heard the sparrows in the gutters,  
You had such a vision of the street  
As the street hardly understands;  
35 Sitting along the bed's edge, where  
You curled the papers from your hair,  
Or clasped the yellow soles of feet  
In the palms of both soiled hands.

#### IV

- His soul stretched tight across the skies  
40 That fade behind a city block,  
Or trampled by insistent feet  
At four and five and six o'clock;  
And short square fingers stuffing pipes,  
And evening newspapers, and eyes  
45 Assured of certain certainties,  
The conscience of a blackened street  
Impatient to assume the world. **B**

- I am moved by fancies that are curled  
Around these images, and cling;  
50 The notion of some infinitely gentle  
Infinitely suffering thing.

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;  
The worlds revolve like ancient women  
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

**36 curled . . . hair:** removed the paper curlers around which hair was wound; suggests that the “you” being addressed is a woman.

#### **B** STYLE

“His” in line 39 refers to the street. In lines 39–47, Eliot **personifies** the street, just as morning is personified in Section II. Why do you think Eliot employs this stylistic technique? Explain what you think it serves to convey or emphasize.

## Literary Analysis

1. **Summarize** Describe the poem’s **setting**, citing specific lines or phrases that allow you to envision the place Eliot describes.
2. **Interpret** A prelude is a short musical piece based on a recurrent theme. Why do you think Eliot titled this poem “Preludes”? Does knowing the meaning of this word give you any new insights into the poem? Explain.



# The Hollow Men

T. S. Eliot

*Mistah Kurtz—he dead.  
A penny for the Old Guy*

## I

We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together  
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!  
5 Our dried voices, when  
We whisper together  
Are quiet and meaningless  
As wind in dry grass  
Or rats' feet over broken glass  
10 In our dry cellar

Shape without form, shade without colour,  
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

Those who have crossed  
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom  
15 Remember us—if at all—not as lost  
Violent souls, but only  
As the hollow men  
The stuffed men. **C**

## II

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams  
20 In death's dream kingdom  
These do not appear:  
There, the eyes are  
Sunlight on a broken column  
There, is a tree swinging  
25 And voices are  
In the wind's singing  
More distant and more solemn  
Than a fading star.

[Epigraph] **Mistah . . . dead:** a quotation from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which Kurtz is a character whose descent into evil makes him like the "lost violent souls" in lines 15–16. **A penny . . . Guy:** a cry used by English children collecting money to buy fireworks for Guy Fawkes Day, a yearly celebration of the failure of Guy Fawkes and other conspirators to blow up Parliament in 1605. The celebration also traditionally includes the burning of straw effigies of Fawkes.

**4 Headpiece . . . straw:** The speaker likens himself and the other "hollow men" to the straw effigies burned on Guy Fawkes Day.

**14 death's other Kingdom:** perhaps heaven (as opposed to hell, where the "lost violent souls" go).

**C STYLE**  
Recall that Eliot often conveys ideas through **symbols** and **allusions** instead of direct statements. Why does the speaker liken himself and his companions to straw effigies?

Let me be no nearer  
 30 In death's dream kingdom  
 Let me also wear  
 Such deliberate disguises  
 Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves  
 In a field  
 35 Behaving as the wind behaves  
 No nearer—

Not that final meeting  
 In the twilight kingdom

### III

This is the dead land  
 40 This is cactus land  
 Here the stone images  
 Are raised, here they receive  
 The supplication of a dead man's hand  
 Under the twinkle of a fading star.

45 Is it like this  
 In death's other kingdom  
 Waking alone  
 At the hour when we are  
 Trembling with tenderness  
 50 Lips that would kiss  
 Form prayers to broken stone. **D**

### IV

The eyes are not here  
 There are no eyes here  
 In this valley of dying stars  
 55 In this hollow valley  
 This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places  
 We grope together  
 And avoid speech  
 60 Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

Sightless, unless  
 The eyes reappear  
 As the perpetual star  
 Multifoliate rose  
 65 Of death's twilight kingdom  
 The hope only  
 Of empty men.

**33 Rat's coat . . . field:** a typical scarecrow with small animals attached. The staves are the poles that support it.

**43 supplication** (sŭp'ĩ-kā'shən): begging; plea.

**D READING MODERN VERSE**  
 Note the different **images** Eliot presents of the "dead land." What does each image convey? Together, what do they tell you about the hollow men's existence?

**60 tumid** (tōō'mĩd): swollen.

**64 Multifoliate** (mŭl'tə-fō'lē-āt') **rose:** an allusion to the many-petaled rose formed by the souls of the blessed in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

## V

*Here we go round the prickly pear  
Prickly pear prickly pear  
70 Here we go round the prickly pear  
At five o'clock in the morning.*

Between the idea  
And the reality  
Between the motion  
75 And the act  
Falls the Shadow

*For Thine is the Kingdom* **E**

Between the conception  
And the creation  
80 Between the emotion  
And the response  
Falls the Shadow

*Life is very long*

Between the desire  
85 And the spasm  
Between the potency  
And the existence  
Between the essence  
And the descent  
90 Falls the Shadow **F**

*For Thine is the Kingdom*

For Thine is  
Life is  
For Thine is the

95 *This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.*

**68–71 Here . . . morning:** a variation of the children's rhyme "Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush," replacing the mulberry bush with a prickly pear cactus, appropriate to the "cactus land" of line 40.



TEKS 7

### **E ALLUSION**

An **allusion** is an indirect reference to a person, place, event, or literary work with which the author believes the reader will be familiar. Here Eliot is quoting the beginning of a sentence added to the Lord's Prayer by many Christians. The "Kingdom" to which it refers is the kingdom of God. If this appears to be the speech of the Hollow Men, why might they repeat this line from the Lord's Prayer?

### **F STYLE**

How do you interpret the "Shadow" mentioned here and in lines 76 and 82? Explain what you think it might **symbolize**.

## Literary Analysis

- 1. Summarize** Describe the hollow men. What are their key **traits**, and what is their existence like?
- 2. Analyze Imagery** What images are repeated in this poem? What ideas do these images convey? Cite evidence to support your answer.

from *The Book of Practical Cats*

# The Naming of Cats

T. S. Eliot

The Naming of Cats is a difficult matter,  
It isn't just one of your holiday games;  
You may think at first I'm as mad as a hatter  
When I tell you, a cat must have THREE DIFFERENT NAMES.  
5 First of all, there's the name that the family use daily,  
Such as Peter, Augustus, Alonzo or James,  
Such as Victor or Jonathan, George or Bill Bailey—  
All of them sensible everyday names.  
There are fancier names if you think they sound sweeter,  
10 Some for the gentlemen, some for the dames:  
Such as Plato, Admetus, Electra, Demeter—  
But all of them sensible everyday names.  
But I tell you, a cat needs a name that's particular,  
A name that's peculiar, and more dignified,  
15 Else how can he keep up his tail perpendicular,  
Or spread out his whiskers, or cherish his pride?  
Of names of this kind, I can give you a quorum,  
Such as Munkustrap, Quaxo, or Coricopat,  
Such as Bombalurina, or else Jellylorum—  
20 Names that never belong to more than one cat.  
But above and beyond there's still one name left over,  
And that is the name that you never will guess;  
The name that no human research can discover—  
But the CAT HIMSELF KNOWS, and will never confess. **G**  
25 When you notice a cat in profound meditation,  
The reason, I tell you, is always the same:  
His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation  
Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name:  
His ineffable effable  
30 Effanineffable  
Deep and inscrutable singular Name.

**11 Plato . . . Demeter:** names from classical Greek and Roman times.

**17 quorum** (kwôr'əm): a select group or company.

**G STYLE**  
How does this poem differ stylistically from the two preceding ones? Do you see any similarities? Explain, citing evidence.

**29 ineffable** (ĭn-ĕf'ə-bəl): too awesome or sacred to be spoken; **effable** (ĕf'ə-bəl): capable of being uttered.



## Comprehension

- Recall** According to “The Naming of Cats,” how many names must a cat have?
- Clarify** What are the different uses of the names?

## Literary Analysis

- Understand Modern Verse** Review the images and ideas you recorded as you read “Preludes.” What view of modern urban life does Eliot convey through each of the following?

- description of the storm (lines 5–13)
- depiction of the street (lines 39–47)
- portrayal of morning (lines 14–23)
- final simile (lines 53–54)

- Draw Conclusions** How do you interpret Section V of “The Hollow Men”? What do you think keeps the hollow men from fulfillment? Support your conclusions with textual evidence.

- Analyze Sound Devices** Eliot often uses sound devices to connect his fragmentary images. Re-examine “The Hollow Men,” noting examples of each sound device listed in the chart. Use your completed chart to describe the effect these sound devices have on the poem.

Sound Device	Example
rhyme	
alliteration	
consonance	

- Analyze Mood** The **imagery** in a poem usually contributes to its mood. How would you describe the mood of “Preludes” and that of “The Hollow Men”? How does the mood of “The Naming of Cats” differ?

- Examine Style** Re-examine “Preludes” and “The Hollow Men,” noting examples of the stylistic elements discussed on page 1117. What relationship do you see between Eliot’s style and his message? Do you think his style mirrors his ideas about the human condition? Cite evidence.



**READING 3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, figurative language, graphics, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods. **7** Analyze how the author’s patterns of imagery, literary allusions, and conceits reveal theme, set tone, and create meaning in metaphors, passages, and literary works.

## Literary Criticism

- Critical Interpretations** Eliot has always been both praised and criticized. One of his detractors bemoaned the “sterility, inaction, detachment, and despair which dominate Eliot’s poetry.” Do you agree with this assessment of Eliot’s work? Explain, citing evidence from the text.

### *Is the world* **FALLING APART?**

“Preludes” and “The Hollow Men” are concerned with the disintegration of traditional values and beliefs in the modern world. What works of literature or films that you know of deal with this topic in today’s culture?

## Conventions in Writing

### ◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Choose Effective Words

One of the striking aspects of Eliot's poetic style is his use of highly **effective words**. In "Preludes," for example, he uses fresh, evocative **adjectives** to create a disturbing image of an urban wasteland. Note how, in this passage, the adjectives work to create the atmosphere of desolation that Eliot wants to convey to the reader:

*And now a **gusty** shower wraps  
The **grimy** scraps  
Of **withered** leaves about your feet  
And newspapers from **vacant** lots; (lines 5–8)*

**PRACTICE** Review the following stanza. Then, mimicking Eliot's poetic style, replace the adjectives in the stanza with more vivid ones that better convey an atmosphere of decay and destitution.

The rain poured down  
On old gutters full of old leaves and faded trash  
And in the dark doorway of an unoccupied cafe  
A man clasped his thin knees  
To his skinny chest

### READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Expand your understanding of Eliot's style by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tips** to improve your poem.

#### WRITING PROMPT

**COMPOSE A POEM** Review lines 39–47 of "Preludes," carefully considering Eliot's personification of the street. Adopting the identity of the street itself, write a **three-to-five-stanza poem** that presents some of the images the street "sees" during the long night. Try to imitate Eliot's style by creating a patchwork of images, symbols, and allusions.

#### REVISING TIPS

- Add more literary allusions or quotes if your poem does not seem to match Eliot's style.
- Make sure your poem includes some examples of sound devices such as alliteration, consonance, or assonance.



**WRITING 14B** Write a poem that reflects an awareness of poetic conventions and traditions within different forms. **ORAL AND WRITTEN CONVENTIONS 17** Understand the function of and use the conventions of academic language when speaking and writing.

Interactive  
Revision



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