

World Literature

Students read the works of international authors, both current and historical, and refine grammar and composition skills through writing a variety of papers on different topics. In addition to active reading and critical evaluation of literature, students write a variety of essays (expository, compare/contrast, personal opinion, and interpretive), a biographical research paper, poetry, movie reviews, news articles, an analysis of symbolism and irony, and a one-act play. The following books are required for this course:

- The Oak Meadow World Literature Syllabus
- *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes
- *The Ramayana*, translated and condensed by R. K. Narayan
- *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka
- *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen

Outline of the World Literature Syllabus:

- Lesson 1:** Question Essay
- Lesson 2:** Active Reading
Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*
- Lesson 3:** *The Metamorphosis*
Essay Assignment
- Lesson 4:** *The Metamorphosis*
Add an Episode
- Lesson 5:** Writing a Biographical
Research Paper
- Lesson 6:** Complete Research Paper
- Lesson 7:** The *Ramayana*, Chapters 1-2
- Lesson 8:** The *Ramayana*, Chapters 3-4
- Lesson 9:** The *Ramayana*, Chapters 5-7
- Lesson 10:** The *Ramayana*, Chapters 8-14
- Lesson 11:** The *Ramayana*
Essay Writing
- Lesson 12:** Japanese Haiku
Matsuo Basho
Kobayashi Issa
- Lesson 13:** Writing Introductions
and Conclusions
- Lesson 14:** Writing a Compare/Contrast Essay
Choosing a Topic
Outlining: Comparing and
Contrasting Strategies
Drafting
- Lesson 15:** Writing a Movie Review
- Lesson 16:** English Romantic Poetry
A Note on Prosody
Memorization
- Lesson 17:** John Keats, *Ode on a Grecian
Urn* and *Ode to a Nightingale*
Reading and Explicating a Poem
Compose an Ode
- Lesson 18:** Dylan Thomas, *Fern Hill*
Write a Comparison Paper
- Lesson 19:** Composition Nuts and Bolts
Quote Incorporation
Writing Versus Speaking
Mixed Construction and
Sentence Logic
- Lesson 20:** Writing a “Taking a Stand” Essay
- Lesson 21:** Leo Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata*
- Lesson 22:** *The Kreutzer Sonata*
Essay Assignment
- Lesson 23:** Personal Essay
- Lesson 24:** Copying, Outlining, and
Summarizing a Published Essay
- Lesson 25:** Writing a News Article
- Lesson 26:** *A Doll’s House*, Act I
- Lesson 27:** *A Doll’s House*, Act II
Add a Scene
- Lesson 28:** *A Doll’s House*, Act III
- Lesson 29:** Figures of Speech,
Symbolism, and Irony
- Lesson 30:** Writing a One-Act Play
- Lesson 31:** Writing in the Workplace
- Lesson 32:** *Don Quixote*, Chapters 1-8
- Lesson 33:** *Don Quixote*, Chapters 9-13
- Lesson 34:** *Don Quixote*, Chapters 14-18
- Lesson 35:** *Don Quixote*, Chapters 19-24
- Lesson 36:** World Literature
Comparative Essay

Lesson 17: “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and “Ode to a Nightingale”

By John Keats

John Keats, a contemporary of Wordsworth, was a leading romantic poet of his time. In his short life, he composed some of the most enduring verses in all of poetry. “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and “Ode to a Nightingale” are two of Keats’s masterpieces.

A Note on the Ode

The origin of the *ode* can be traced back to the Greek poet Pindar in the 5th century B.C. Emotional and ceremonious, the ode is a lyrical poem of exalted praise. Through the years, it has claimed many different forms. Earlier odes, including the Pindaric Ode, were unpredictable in their prosody. As if to mirror the exalted state of the poet, the stanzas featured unpatterned rhyme schemes and line lengths. Later, the Horatian Ode took on a more regular form.

Assignments

1. Read “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (see the Appendix, pages 108-110).
2. Answer the questions in full sentences, remembering to draw on specific lines from the poem to support your responses.
3. Read “Ode to a Nightingale” (in the Appendix, pages 110-113).
4. Explicate “Ode to a Nightingale” (this is explained below).
5. Write an ode (this is explained below).

Questions

1. What is the form and structure of the poem? (Refer to “Prosody” in Lesson 16.) Given the information above, is “Ode on a Grecian Urn” more Pindaric or Horatian in its prosody?
2. Compare Keats’s language to the language of Wordsworth. How are they similar? How are they different?
3. The urn is decorated with many scenes. What is the background setting of these scenes? What is the season?
4. Why is the urn able to “express / A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme?”
5. What does Keats mean when he says that “Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter?” Whom or what is he addressing in these lines?

6. Describe the young lovers on the urn. What does Keats have to say about their situation? How does it contribute to the theme of the poem?
7. Explain why the “little town... for evermore will silent be.”
8. Why is Keats so worshipful towards the urn? Why does Keats consider the urn “a friend to man?” What is it about the urn that merits such praise and inspires such wonder in him?
9. Discuss the importance of time/timelessness in the ode. Be sure to use specific lines to support your response.
10. *“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,” — that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.*

These are two of Keats’s most famous lines. Whose words are being quoted in the first line? What do they mean? Why is this truth “all [we] need to know?” Why does the urn evoke such a profound utterance?

Reading and Explicating a Poem

The next poem you will read is Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale.” Rather than respond to a series of questions, you will be asked to *explicate* the poem. To explicate a poem means to *explain it in detail*.

In addition to attending to the prosody, you should uncover as much of the poem’s depth and meaning as possible. Use direct quotes to support your assertions about the poem’s meaning.

Of course, there are many approaches to this assignment. You might want to move through the poem linearly, unpacking it stanza by stanza; you might choose to explain how the poem amplifies a certain theme. The key here is to be *thorough*.

Note: “Nightingale” will require several readings. Since the poem contains mythological and biblical references, keep a resource book handy. Some anthologies contain notes explaining these references.

Compose an Ode

Compose an ode. Remember to maintain a tone of exaltation and praise. If you choose, follow one of Keats’s forms; otherwise, feel free to write a free-verse ode. The poem should be at least sixteen lines long. **Send this to your class teacher.**