



Lesson – 16

The School Boy

About the Poet:



William Blake (1757-1827) is one of the most famous English poets, painters, and print-makers of the Romantic Age. He was born on 28 November 1757, in Soho, London, United Kingdom. His major works include *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*. Though he is now considered as a major poet and an original thinker, William Blake was not recognized and honoured as a poet and painter when he was alive. He passed away on 12 August 1827 in Westminster, United Kingdom.

Glossary:

1. **Morn:** Morning
2. **Huntsman:** Someone who hunts; hunter
3. **Winds horn:** Blows horn
4. **Drive away:** (here) take away; force to go away
5. **Outworn:** out-of-date; obsolete; exhausted in strength.
6. **Dismay:** (n) sudden or complete loss of courage; utter disheartenment.
7. **At times:** Sometimes
8. **Drooping:** hanging or bending down from exhaustion or tiredness.
9. **Many an anxious hour:** Many anxious hours.
10. **Bower:** a shaded, leafy resting place
11. **Learning's bower:** (here) classroom
12. **Worn:** bored or tired
13. **Dreary:** uninteresting; wearisome
14. **Dreary shower:** (here) Boring lectures

15. **Annoy:** irritate; upset
16. **Nip:** take away by pinching
17. **Strip:** remove, pull
18. **Care's dismay:** disillusionment, distress caused by loneliness or anxiety.
19. **Summer:** (here) a time of blossoming, greatest happiness, etc.
20. **Winter:** (here) A period of time characterized by coldness, misery, barrenness, decline, decay etc.
21. **Mellowing:** sweet, soft and pleasant.
22. **Blast:** a sudden and strong gust of air; a violent explosion.

Questions and Answers based on lines of the poem

Read the following lines from the poem “The School Boy” and answer the questions that follow.

I love to rise in a summer morn,
 When the birds sing on every tree;
 The distant huntsman winds his horn,
 And the skylark sings with me:
 O what sweet company!

But to go to school in a summer morn, -
 O it drives all joy away!
 Under a cruel eye outworn,
 The little ones spend the day
 In sighing and dismay.

Ah then at times I drooping sit,
 And spend many an anxious hour;
 Nor in my book can I take delight,
 Nor sit in learning's bower,
 Worn through with the dreary shower.

1. Why does the boy love to rise in the summer morning?
2. Who is making sweet company with the boy?
3. What drives all joy away from the boy?
4. What does ‘cruel eye outworn’ refer to?
5. How do the little ones spend the day at school?
6. How does the boy spend his long hours at school?
7. Pick out instances of auditory images from these lines.

Read the following lines from the poem “The School Boy” and answer the questions that follow.

How can the bird that is born for joy
 Sit in a cage and sing?
 How can a child, when fears annoy,
 But droop his tender wing,
 And forget his youthful spring!

O father and mother if buds are nipped,

And blossoms blown away;
 And if the tender plants are stripped
 Of their joy in the springing day,
 By sorrow and care's dismay, -

How shall the summer arise in joy,
 Or the summer fruits appear?
 Or how shall we gather what griefs destroy,
 Or bless the mellowing year,
 When the blasts of winter appear?

8. What is the figure of speech used in lines 'How can the birds that is born for joy, Sit in a cage and sing?'
9. What are things with which the school boy is compared?
10. Pick out a few instances of visual images.
11. What does the poet want to tell fathers and mothers through the boy?
12. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem?

Answers to the Questions based on lines of the poem

1. In the summer morning the birds sing on every tree and the huntsman blows his horn. The singing skylark gives the boy a sweet company. He loves to rise in such a morning to enjoy all these.
2. The skylark is making a sweet company with the boy.
3. The thought of going to school in a summer morning takes all joy away.
4. The 'cruel eye outworn' refers to an old and strict school teacher.
5. The little ones spend the day in sigh of distress and dismay.
6. The school boy spends long hours in anxiety. He sits in his class bored without being able to take any interest either in books or in lectures.
7. Songs of birds, singing of the skylark, and blowing of huntsman's horn.
8. It's a rhetorical question.
9. The school boy is compared with a caged bird, first of all. Also, the boy is compared with buds, blossoms, and tender plants.
10. The bird in a cage, the little boy, the nipped buds, the stripped tender plants, the blossoms are a few visual images seen in these lines.
11. The poet actually warns the parents against making their children caged birds. The little ones need a friendly and natural atmosphere to grow and learn things. They must not be chained in rigid man-made systems hindering their natural gains and growth in their tender times.
12. ABABB is the rhyme scheme of the poem.

(Activity 1, textbook page170) Solutions to Textual Activities

Images	What they stand for
School boy	Freshness, playfulness
School	Formal education, present and future, hindering of natural growth, maturity
Bird	Nature as free and unfettered, freedom, music
Plant	Spring as time of growth, tenderness

➤ (Activity 2, textbook page 170)

Find out the images from the poem and categorize them.

Visual images	Both visual and auditory	Auditory images
Boy sitting droopingly Little ones (children) Cruel-eyed teachers Birds, Skylark Birds in cage, Nipped buds, Stripped plants, Fruits, Huntsman	Little ones and their sighs Boy and skylark and their songs. Birds and their singing. Huntsman' horn and his blowing sound	Skylark's songs Birds' singing Huntsman's blowing horn. The little ones' sighing.

Prepare an appreciation of the poem focusing on the theme, poetic devices, style etc.

The School Boy – an appreciation

In the poem, The School Boy, the poet William Blake critically points out the defects and downsides of the modern class-room education system. Blake, instead, promotes learning outside the classroom, specifically learning in nature where he believes spontaneous and natural creativity flourishes. The school boy who loves to rise in a summer morning and enjoys the sweet company of a skylark when it sings with him, dislikes going to school. The very thought of going to school takes all joy away from him.

Through the perspective of a school boy, the poet raises a thought-provoking question in front of the world. How can a bird that is born for joy sing songs when it is caged? How can a little boy, who wants to enjoy the scenes and sounds of nature in a summer morning, sit in a classroom under the cruel eyes of teachers and take delight in books and learning? A little boy can never enjoy his youthful spring when fears annoy him.

The boy addresses the parents of all children asking them a certain questions. If the buds are nipped, blossoms are blown away and tender plants are destroyed in their springing days, how can they bear fruits when the blossoming and fruiting season of summer arrives? If the destroying and decaying season of winter comes and destroys tender plants at their growing stage, how can we compensate for what we lost?

In this poem, the allusions to nature are everywhere referring to seasons and things in nature such as summer, spring, winter, buds, blossoms, plants, fruits and birds. The poet equates the seasons of the Earth to the seasons of the boy's growth. Nature, innocence and spirit of the freedom are thematized in almost every line of the poem. ABABB is the rhyme scheme and there are a lot of visual and auditory images in the poem. This poem depends upon three inter-related images, the schoolboy, birds and plants. The skylark, the birds, the cruel-eyed teacher, the children, the caged bird, the nipped buds, the stripped plants, the blossoms, the huntsman are some of the **visual images** in the poem. Songs of the skylark and other birds, the blowing of the huntsman's horn and the sigh of the school-children are examples of the **auditory images**.

The poet compares the boy with a caged bird, asking a **Rhetorical Question**, "How can the bird that is born for joy / Sit in a cage and sing?" In the next stanza, the children are compared to "nipped buds" and "tender plants stripped / Of their joy in the springing day". These comparisons are best example of **Metaphors** very aptly used in this poem.