

Note: The transactional processes suggested in CISCE curriculum are highlighted in grey.

### Learning Outcomes

- To understand the theme of correlation between nature and human life
- To identify and appreciate the imagery used in the poem
- To observe the effect of the song on the poet
- To identify figures of speech in the poem

**Summary:** The speaker in the poem draws the reader's attention to a Scottish farm-girl singing to herself while cutting corn during harvesting. He asks the reader to stop and listen or walk away quietly without disturbing her. In the poem, the speaker pictures a young girl working alone, cutting the corn and binding them into sheaves. She sings a sad song that reverberates throughout the valley. The impact of her song is as welcoming as the song of the nightingale in an oasis is to Arabians travelling across the hot desert sands. Her voice is sweeter than the voice of the cuckoo that sings in spring on the Scottish islands of Hebrides. He could not make out what she was singing as she was singing in her language. He imagines that she could be singing sad songs about some ancient battles or about some sorrow, loss or pain that is natural to anyone. Whatever be the subject matter, the girl sang continuously as she reaped the harvest, and she sang as if the song had no end. He stood still for a while listening to her. And as he walked up the hill, he carried the tune in his heart long after he could hear her no more.

### Pre-reading

Group Work

Ask students:

- Do you listen to music?
- What type of music do you like?
- What is the effect of music on you?
- Which aspect of a song affects you more—music or lyrics?
- Have you ever heard a song in a language you do not understand?
- Were you able to enjoy it?
- Are lyrics important to truly enjoy a song? Why? / Why not?

### READING

Students predict, comprehend and paraphrase

Let students read the poem. Stop after each stanza to explain/ discuss/ check comprehension.

Ask students:

What are the two birds Wordsworth compares the reaper's song to? What is the setting of the

poem? Why does the speaker use expressions of command, like 'Behold' and 'O listen'? (To get the attention of the reader; this is a lyric, a subjective poem in which the speaker speaks to the reader directly to share a personal emotional experience.) What are the expressions used to say that the girl is alone? (Single, solitary, by herself, alone) How do we

know that the reaper's song had a lasting effect on the poet? What does the poet think she is singing about? What is the poem about? What was the solitary reaper doing while she sang?

Pick out lines from the poem which tell us that these may be the possibilities of the reaper's song.

- Everyday events – (*familiar matter of today*)
- A historical event – (*And battles long ago*)
- A tragedy in the past – (*for old, unhappy far off things*)
- Death or loss of a loved one – (*some natural sorrow loss or pain*)

Explain who hears the song of each of the below, where they hear it and what is the impact?

- Solitary reaper—poet hears – in the Scottish highlands – it leaves him awestruck
- Nightingale—travellers- Arabian sands- gave them the feeling of shade in the Arabian desert
- Cuckoo—people from far off lands- Hebrides-broke the silence of the seas in springtime, had a far reaching effect

### Poetic devices

*Rhyme scheme*

- Verses 1 and 7 have a similar rhyme scheme; only lines 2 and 4 rhyme – *lass-pass; ending-bending* (abcb)
- Verses 3 and 5 have a similar rhyme scheme; lines 1 and 3 rhyme and lines 2 and 4 rhyme – *chaunt-haunt; bands-sands; sings-things; flow-ago* (abab)
- Verses 2, 4, 6 and 8 have a similar rhyme scheme Lines 1 and 2 rhyme and lines 3 and 4 rhyme – *grain-strain; profound-sound ...* (aabb)

*Hyperbole*(exaggerated statement)

- Breaking the silence of the seas among the farthest Hebrides - The voice of the girl

was so sweet that it broke the silence of the seas and of the far of islands on north-western coast of Scotland. These islands are never disturbed by any storm but the voice of the girl had intruded the silence of these groups of islands.

- Listen! For the Vale profound is overflowing with the sound – he says that the whole deep valley is echoing with her sweet song

*Simile*

- In the spring time from the Cuckoo-bird: used as a comparison to the maiden's voice. The poet says that such a sweet voice was never heard from the cuckoo even in the Spring season)
- No Nightingale did ever chaunt: The nightingale is considered a sweet-voiced bird. The poet says no nightingale has so far sung as melodious a song as the girl.

*Imagery*

- *Listen! For the Vale profound is overflowing with the sound*
- *Reaping and singing by herself, I saw her singing at her work and More welcome notes to weary bands.*

*Assonance*(repetition of vowel sounds in the same line)

- sound of /i/ in *Behold her, single in the field* and the sound of /o/ and /a/ in *Yon solitary Highland Lass!*

### Post-reading

*Group work*

Create a collage to portray something natural / ordinary which depicts music. Example: the sound of rain, the sound of a train, the song of a bird. Things from nature (leaves, flowers), pictures and drawings can be used to create a nature-collage. Compare the sound to things of nature like the way the poet does.

## STUDENTS' BOOK ANSWER KEY

### The Solitary Reaper

#### Comprehension

- A.**
1. The reaper was cutting and binding the stalks of grain in a field when the speaker first saw her. She was singing to herself while working.
  2. The speaker compares the reaper's song to that of the nightingale and the cuckoo-bird. He says that no nightingale sang more welcome notes to tired travellers, nor did any cuckoo sing in so thrilling a manner in spring as the reaper was singing.
  3. The speaker thinks that the song could be about old, unhappy, far-off things, and old battles. Or it could be about something simpler, some familiar matter of the present time—some natural sorrow, loss, or pain. He thinks that the song must be a sad one as the tune of the song was sad and melancholy.
  4. The speaker says that the deep valley seemed to be overflowing with the sound of the reaper's song. Her voice seemed to break the silence of the seas among far-off islands. And she sang gently and continuously, as if the song did not have an ending. All these made it feel as if the reaper's song reached everywhere and went on and on.
- B.**
1.
    - a. The field by a hill, where the reaper was working and singing, has been referred to as 'here'.
    - b. The speaker says 'Stop here, or gently pass' because he suggests that one could wait at that spot and listen to the reaper's song, or, if he wanted to continue walking, then he should do that softly, so as not to disturb the reaper's singing.
    - c. *Suggested answer (accept any logical answer):* He could be addressing the reader(s) of the poem, anyone who might be passing that field, or he could also be addressing himself, telling himself to wait and listen to the song or move along without disturbing the reaper.
  2. This line suggests that the speaker did not understand the words of the song, since he is asking if someone could tell him what the reaper was singing about. We also know this as he says 'perhaps' she sang of old, unhappy things; because he asks, rather than tells, if it could be a simple song about a familiar matter; and because he writes, 'whatever the theme...'
  3.
    - a. The speaker kept listening to the song because he was fascinated by its melancholy yet beautiful melody. It reminded him of many wonderful things and made him wonder about the theme of the song.
    - b. No, he waited and listened to the song for a while, and then he climbed up the hill and went on his way.
    - c. He carried the memory of the song with him, as if it was playing in his mind, even after he could not actually hear it.
- C.** *Suggested answers (accept any logical answer):*
1. Although the speaker liked the song very much and was curious about what it meant, he did not ask the reaper about its meaning because he did not wish to

disturb her while she was engrossed in her work and in her song. It is also possible that for the speaker, not knowing the exact meaning of the song added to its charm, and he preferred to wonder about its meaning than know what it meant exactly.

2. Although the speaker did not know the girl or the exact meaning of her song, he is very likely to remember it later, because he says in the last two lines, 'The music in my heart I bore, / Long after it was heard no more.' The scene of the reaper working in the field and the sound of her music, all of it created a strong impression on the speaker, bringing to his mind many things beyond that particular place and time. He wrote this poem about the experience. So he will remember it as a lovely little episode.

### **Appreciating the Poem**

*Sample answers:* c. a nightingale singing in a far-off land near a tired group of travellers, who are glad to hear the bird

- d. the song of the cuckoo floating in the spring air, thrilling everyone who hears it
- e. a song floating over the waters of the sea, where everything else is silent, and only some remote islands can be seen
- f. battles and other events that took place many years ago and that had a sad outcome—something that would remind us of a sad song

### **Vocabulary**

1. ANTHEM
2. CAROL
3. DUET
4. JINGLE
5. KARAOKE

## QUESTION BANK

### The Solitary Reaper

#### A. Answer in brief.

Why is the poet attracted to the song of the girl?

**Ans:** The poet draws our attention to a single young woman singing a lyric as she gathers crops all alone. The song has a sad tone to it and the poet feels that the entire valley resounds with this magnificent song. The poet wonders why her song is melancholic and is drawn to it.

#### B. Answer in detail.

How is the poet affected by the song of the solitary reaper?

**Ans:** The poet, enthralled by the music of the solitary reaper, elaborates how great the song of the highland lass is. He says that no nightingale ever sang to the weary travellers, anything even remotely as beautiful as the young woman sang. He also says that the solitary singer's voice is far more thrilling than the cuckoo's spring time song which breaks the silence of the oceans. He is so captivated by the song that he stops motionless in his tracks and listens silently to the mesmerising voice. Then he moves on, carrying the melody of the young woman's song in his heart, to be cherished forever.

#### C. Choose the correct answer.

*Why does the poet want to know the theme of the solitary reaper's song?*

- He wonders whether she is singing a song for him.
- He is curious because the song sounds so melodious.
- He thinks she experienced a tragedy and might need some help.

**Ans:** b

#### D. Read the lines and answer the questions.

*Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang  
As if her song could have no ending;  
I saw her singing at her work,  
And o'er the sickle bending*

- What does the poet mean in the second line?
- What does the young woman do while singing?
- Identify the rhyme scheme in the above lines.

**Ans:** a. The highland lass seemed to sing a song as though it would have no ending.  
b. The young woman continued with her singing while gathering and cutting crops.  
c. The rhyme scheme is a b c b.

#### E. Answer in detail. (Think and answer)

*Music transcends all barriers.* Elaborate with reference to the poem.

**Ans:** Music lives in the heart of every person. It sees no barriers. Since it transcends all barriers, it brings peace, harmony and love in the minds of anyone listening to it. In the poem, the poet is delighted to hear the wonderful, pleasant, soothing music sung by the highland lass. However, he does experience a barrier for a moment in the form of language. He speculates for some time to understand the theme but gives up as he is overwhelmed by the unending blissful melody. The language barrier does not bother him anymore. He stops motionless and listens intently to the song and then continues up the hill. Though he moves on, the song has a deep impact on him and as a result the young woman's song stays with him forever.