

## TO THE CUCKOO

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

### Learning Outcomes

- To appreciate the beautiful voice of the cuckoo
- To associate the cuckoo's voice with childhood memories
- To understand the poet's love for nature

**Summary:** *To the Cuckoo* talks about the nostalgia the speaker feels when he hears the voice of the cuckoo. The speaker expresses his adoration for the bird that he has never seen but knows by his voice. He longs to see the bird that transports him back to his childhood days, so effortlessly by just its voice. In this poem, the poet relies, not on his sight but on the emotions that the voice of the cuckoo arouses in him.

### Pre-reading

Ask students:

1. Have you seen or heard a cuckoo?
2. When have you heard the bird?
3. Where do cuckoos lay their eggs? Who looks after their young ones? (They lay it in another bird's nest and the host bird is fooled into raising the infant cuckoo.)

## READING

Play the audio track for the poem / Read the poem aloud once.

Now let students read the poem in parts. Stop at intervals to check comprehension. Allow students time to scan for details before they answer. Guide / prompt them if required.

### Stanza 1 and 2

*Who is the poem addressed to? What image does the speaker convey by calling the cuckoo a "blithe newcomer? (An image of a carefree, merry bird who is disconnected from the restraints of the human materialistic life and who revels in his freedom) Why does he call it a "wandering voice" (he has only heard his voice but has never seen the cuckoo)*

*How does the speaker recognise the bird? (He recognises the bird by his distinguishable twofold cry, which echoes across hills and valleys)*

### Stanza 3 and 4

*Where does the bird's song transport him? (It transports him to his childhood days and acts as a catalyst in bringing back memories of his past.) Has the speaker seen the bird? (No, he has not. It remains a mystery to him.)*

### Stanza 5, 6 and 7

*Where did the poet search for the cuckoo in his childhood days? What feelings were evoked in the speaker? (nostalgic) What does the speaker convey when he calls his childhood days as 'golden'? (The speaker conveys that his childhood days were precious, past memories to him.)*

### Stanza 8

*What are the two contradictory pictures the speaker brings out in the last stanza? (The two contradictory pictures are of the earth as a place filled with restrictions of materialistic*

life and as a place that is brimming with mystical wonders of nature. Such a versatile place is fit for the cuckoo's dwelling as it too is mysterious, having such a voice, yet hidden from the poet's view. )

*Is the poem only an ode to the cuckoo?* (No, it is not just an ode. It is an ode to the mysterious nature of the cuckoo bird, and at the same time, it celebrates the beauty of nature.)

### Poetic devices

**Rhyme Scheme:** The poem consists of eight stanzas, each being a quatrain, i.e., consisting of four lines. A rhyme scheme of abab is followed throughout the poem. It follows an alternate rhyme scheme.

**Alliteration:** The repetition of initial consonant sounds and alliterations creates rhythm and mood in the poem to capture the reader's interest. Example: *Wandering Voice, Hill to hill, Blessed bird*

**Hyperbole:** The poet uses exaggeration to focus on certain aspects of the cuckoo and nature. The earth is called an "unsubstantial, faery place." This creates an image of a

mystical place and adds mystery to the cuckoo who the poet has never seen.

The poet refers to his childhood as the "golden time." This is done to establish how precious the memories of his childhood are to him.

**Imagery:** The use of imagery projects the reader's mind with the picture of Spring in England. The usage of words like sunshine, flowers, Vale (valley) creates a sunny and happy image. The reference to green fields and the cuckoo give this poem a pastoral touch and reveal the poet's attachment to nature. Calling the cuckoo "blithe" and expressing his joy in welcoming back the cuckoo, the poet gives the poem undertones of happiness and ecstasy. The poet talks about the season when he refers to the cuckoo as the "Darling of Spring."

### Post-reading

#### Group Discussion

Does the cuckoo's voice sound musical? What effect has music on you?

## STUDENTS' BOOK ANSWER KEY

### To the Cuckoo

#### Comprehension

- A.
1. The speaker can hear the cuckoo during the season of spring, while he is lying on the grass. He can hear the cuckoo's call from different directions—from the hills, in the valley, in woods and on the plain.
  2. The cuckoo's call seems to come from everywhere because the speaker can never actually spot the bird—he can only hear its call. So it seems to pass from one hill to another, seems to come from both nearby and faraway; the bird seems to call to the valley and to the speaker. The speaker can hear it as he is lying on the plain. Perhaps the speaker hears different cuckoos in different places, but imagines it to be the same bird.
  3. According to the speaker, the cuckoo sings about sunshine and flowers to the valley. However, the call reminds him of many other things—imaginary or related to the future.
  4. As a school-boy, the speaker used to look a thousand ways to find the bird whose call he heard and loved. He looked in bushes, trees and the sky. He wandered through woods and on the green to try and spot the bird, but could never see it.

5. When the speaker listens to the cuckoo as a grown-up, he remembers his schoolboy days when he loved the cuckoo's song and looked for the bird. He feels as if he has gone back to those days. Also, when he listens to the bird, the world around him seems to turn into an unreal, magical place, because the cuckoo's song seems to be more suitable for such a fairy place than for our real world.

- B.**
1. The speaker might call the cuckoo a wandering voice because its call seems to come from different places, as if it is wandering; and since he cannot see the bird, all he can notice about the bird is its voice. So, he feels as if the cuckoo is only a wandering voice.
  2.
    - a. No, the speaker does not describe the lovely sights of springtime in this poem.
    - b. The speaker focuses on the call of the cuckoo, which he can hear in spring.
    - c. The sound of the cuckoo's call fascinates and delights the speaker, making him wonder where the bird is, what it is singing of; it also reminds him of his childhood days and makes his surroundings feel unreal and fairy-like.
  3.
    - a. The cry of the cuckoo is being referred to here. *Suggested answer (accept any logical answer):* It has been capitalised because the speaker is fascinated by the cry—the whole poem is about the cuckoo's cry, and the capital letter is used to give it importance.
    - b. No, the speaker's search was not successful. We know this from the line 'Still longed for, never seen.' It means that the speaker longed for a sight of the bird, but could never see it.
  4. The speaker calls the cuckoo a hope because all his life he had hoped to catch sight of the bird whose call he loved so much. He calls the bird a love because he loved and was fascinated by its call.
  5. This world seems to be a fit home for the bird to the speaker—but he calls it suitable only when the cuckoo's musical voice seems to transform the real world into a magical, unreal place. It is then that the fairy-like world seems to be a suitable home for the fairy-like bird and its voice. (Since the speaker can never see the bird and can only hear its voice, the bird feels like a magical, fairy creature to him.)
- C.**
1. b.
  2. *Free response*

### **Appreciating the Poem**

1. The poem makes it seem as if the speaker is speaking directly to the cuckoo, since the speaker addresses the bird directly—'O Cuckoo! shall I call thee..'; 'Thy twofold shout..'; 'Thou bringest unto me..' and 'thou art to me'. *Suggested answer (accept any logical answer):* The speaker does this instead of talking about the bird because he feels a companionship with the bird in the lap of nature and wants to communicate with it.
2.
  - a. old-fashioned
  - b. timeless
3. The rhyme scheme in the first two stanzas is *abab cdcd*. Yes, the rest of the stanzas follow the same rhyming pattern.

## Vocabulary

- |               |            |                  |
|---------------|------------|------------------|
| 1. longed for | 2. blithe  | 3. wandering     |
| 4. near       | 5. welcome | 6. unsubstantial |

## QUESTION BANK

### To The Cuckoo

#### A. Answer in brief.

Why does the speaker consider the cuckoo a mystery, yet a darling of the Spring?

**Ans:** The speaker has never seen the bird, but has only heard its voice which is welcome because it announces the beginning of Spring.

#### B. Answer in detail.

How does the poet show his fondness for the cuckoo during his childhood days?

**Ans:** The speaker was enchanted when he heard the voice of a cuckoo. It made him remember, with fondness how he searched for the bird in the bush, tree and sky during his childhood days. However, he did not discover the winged creature. He wandered through the woods and a field to find the bird. Though he did not find the bird, he hoped that he would find it one day.

#### C. Choose the correct answer.

The poem "To the Cuckoo" by Wordsworth is a poem \_\_\_\_\_.

- about the speaker's boyhood days
- of joy and happy memories.
- of the speaker's love for nature

**Ans:** b

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

*O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,  
Or but a wandering Voice?*

- Why does the speaker call the bird a 'wandering voice'?
- What does the 'wandering voice' tell the reader about the bird?
- What happens to the speaker on hearing the voice of the cuckoo?

**Ans:** a. He calls it a wandering voice because he has never seen the bird, but has only heard it.

- The bird has an independent nature and goes wherever it wants.
- The speaker is transported to memories of his 'golden' childhood days when he hears the voice of the cuckoo.

#### E. Answer in brief. (Think and Answer)

How does imagery play a large part in evoking the feelings of the reader?

**Ans:** The poet uses a lot of imagery in the poem. The image of Spring in England is evoked with words like sunshine, flowers, Vale (valley), all of which makes a radiant and glad picture. The steady reference to green fields and the cuckoo give the poem a peaceful touch and exhibit the artist's connection to nature. Calling the cuckoo "blithe" and communicating his euphoria in inviting back the cuckoo, the poet gives the poem

undertones of joy and happiness. The poet also gives away the season when he alludes to the cuckoo as the “Darling of Spring”.

**F. Answer in detail. (Think and Answer)**

How does the poem, *To the Cuckoo* capture the poet’s love for nature?

**Ans:** *To the Cuckoo* captures Wordsworth’s love for nature and all the accompanying elements of nature. The poet describes the significance of the voice of the cuckoo bird in his life. The bird’s voice is an indication that the season of Spring has come, a season that welcomes happiness and vitality. These beautiful feelings remind him of his childhood golden days. The poet’s tone is light and he uses imagery to convey the immortality and visionary gleam he feels when he hears the cuckoo.