

## OLYMPIADS SCHOOL/GRADE 9 ENGLISH/HANDOUT 9

### Announcement

The midterm assessment has been scheduled for Class 10. Please prepare for it by reviewing all the handouts and marked homework that you have received so far. No homework will be assigned that week.

### This Week

For this week's homework, we will explore similarities and differences between Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein*, and William Blake's poem, "The Tyger."

Annotate the poem along with your teacher.

"The Tyger"

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,

In the forests of the night;

What immortal hand or eye,

Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.

Burnt the fire of thine eyes?

On what wings dare he aspire?

What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,

Could twist the sinews of thy heart?

And when thy heart began to beat,

What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,

In what furnace was thy brain?

What the anvil? what dread grasp,

Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears

And water'd heaven with their tears:

Did he smile his work to see?

Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,

In the forests of the night:

What immortal hand or eye,

Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Watch and listen to the following three presentations of “The Tyger.” Using the table, discuss the merit and weaknesses of each one. But first, think about the criteria you might use to assess the presentations.

*Criteria*

Take notes after watching each presentation so that they stay fresh in your minds.

Presentations	Notes
<p>The Tyger - A Short Animated Film</p> <p>Radheya Jegatheva  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUqowAVgZxA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUqowAVgZxA</a></p> <p>BEST FILM - Asiagraph Reallusion 2016 3D Competition (Taiwan)            BEST JUNIOR SHORT FILM - Warburton Film Festival (Victoria, Australia)</p>	
<p>The Tyger.wmv  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oF9kbTedTL8">animacrackers</a>  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oF9kbTedTL8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oF9kbTedTL8</a></p> <p>Published on 2 May 2012</p> <p>Mark West of AnimaCrackers created this beautiful animated interpretation of the William Blake poem, read by Kristin Hughes. Bach's Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor, performed by Colin Carr.</p>	
<p>The Tyger - William Blake            Jeff Luciana</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BaClqCeGJ4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BaClqCeGJ4</a></p> <p>Published on 2 Dec 2012            An illustration of William Blake's inquisitive poem The Tyger.</p>	

Assess each presentation.

Presentation	Strengths	Areas for improvement
1		
2		
3		

## An introduction to 'The Tyger'

Web resource: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/an-introduction-to-the-tyger>

- Article by: George Norton
- Theme: Romanticism

**George Norton's close reading of William Blake's 'The Tyger' considers the poem's imagery through 18th-century industrial and political revolutions and moral literature.**

Blake's 'The Tyger' is a great example of T S Eliot's claim that 'Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood'. A quick scan of its key words ('burning', 'night', 'fearful', 'deeps', 'dread', 'deadly', 'terrors'), combined with the insistent, aggressive trochaic rhythm<sup>[1]</sup>, tells us that the poem deals with a darkly intense and awe-inspiring experience. Pinning down exactly what that experience is, however, is very much more difficult.

The poem clearly works on a metaphorical level: tigers can't burn; nights don't have forests. According to I A Richards, metaphors have three elements: a tenor (the meaning behind the metaphor), a vehicle (the image used) and a ground (the basis of the comparison).<sup>[2]</sup> What's interesting about Blake's tiger metaphor is that it's all vehicle and no tenor; what the tiger is intended to express is never made clear.

### **'Did he who made the lamb make thee?'**

Appearing in *Songs of Experience*, 'The Tyger' is usually understood as the companion piece of 'The Lamb' in *Songs of Innocence*; both poems ask the same question: where do we come from? In 'The Lamb', an answer is given: God made us – a simple affirmation of faith. 'The Tyger' only implies the answer by posing the rhetorical question: 'Did he who made the lamb make thee?' Indeed, one of the most noticeable features of 'The Tyger' is that it takes the form of a series of questions, none of which are answered. Whereas 'The Lamb' posits the process of creation as natural and harmonious, 'The Tyger' shows us something much more violent and mysterious; the tiger comes from 'the forests of the night' and its eyes burn in 'distant deeps and skies'. Its creation is an act of confrontation and audacity. The poem shifts between 'could' (ability) and 'dare' (which implies transgression and disobedience), ending in 'dare' in the final stanza, a direct repeat of the first except for the change of verb at the start of the final line, which is marked with a spondee<sup>[3]</sup> ('Dare frame') rather than the iamb<sup>[4]</sup> of the first stanza ('Could frame'), emphasizing its significance.

### **Images of rebellion and revolution**

The poem is full of references to rebellion: to Satan's revolt in *Paradise Lost* ('the stars threw down their spears'), to Prometheus, a favourite rebel of the Romantics ('What the hand dare seize the fire?'), and, perhaps to Icarus ('On what wings dare he aspire?' –

though this line might just as easily evoke Milton's Satan). Such images have led some critics to see the tiger as a metaphor for revolution. As Peter Ackroyd suggests,

'Even as Blake worked upon the poem the revolutionaries in France were being branded in the image of a ravaging beast – after the Paris massacres of September 1792, an English statesman declared, "One might as well think of establishing a republic of tigers in some forests in Africa", and there were newspaper references to "the tribunal of tigers". At a later date Marat's eyes were said to resemble "those of the *tyger cat*".<sup>[5]</sup>

In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes post-revolutionary Paris as 'a place of fear [...] Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam'. The tiger, powerful, unpredictable, gorgeous but deadly, becomes a potent image for what W B Yeats would later call the 'terrible beauty' of revolution.

### Images of industry

Another complex aspect of Blake's metaphor is that, unlike the lamb, who is 'made' by God, the tiger owes its existence to a combination of human labour and industrial process. Stanza three focuses on human effort, the shoulder and the art which 'twist the sinews of thy heart'. Stanza four conceives of the tiger's creation in terms of industry, using a series of metonyms for the blacksmith's forge: 'hammer', 'chain', 'furnace', 'anvil'. While, like all the Romantics, Blake was repelled by the Industrial Revolution and its objectification of human beings, this stanza has undeniable energy and a fascination with what industry can produce: 'what dread grasp | Dare its deadly terrors clasp?' It's interesting that both the worker and the tiger are represented by a strange combination of body parts ('shoulder', 'heart', 'sinews', 'hand', 'feet', 'brain'). A parallel can perhaps be drawn with the creature constructed in a 'workshop of filthy creation' in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, another text which draws upon both *Paradise Lost* and the Prometheus myth, asking questions about who makes us, and deploring industrialisation.

### Uncertainty and ambiguity

Where 'The Lamb' offers the reader simple certainties and the loving, benign God of the New Testament, 'The Tyger' presents creation as enigmatic and unknowable. Some critics see this as indicative of the painful, fallen world of experience where faith is impossible, 'the distant deeps' offering only insecurity and epistemological chaos. 'The Tyger' thus becomes part of the *Experience* poems' pessimism and anguish. But perhaps there is another way of understanding the refusal to offer straightforward answers. As Heather Glen suggests, Blake's ambiguity is part of a broader challenge to 18th-century readers, who would have been familiar with the fashionable instructive literature of the time – literature that provided clear, didactic, moral concepts. 'The contemporary reader', writes Glen, 'might well have been disturbed by the view of life implied by the Songs; but more fundamentally – though perhaps less consciously – disturbing is the fact that there seems to be no obvious argument propounded in them at all'.<sup>[6]</sup> The radical nature of Blake's poetry, Glen suggests, is due to its ambiguity and its lack of clear moral explanation. For Blake, the imagination is the ultimate creative

force: 'What is now proved was once only imagined,' he wrote in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. His complex and enigmatic metaphor creates a space where imaginative energies can be released. Ever the enemy of narrow, earth-bound materialism, Blake reveals 'the forests of the night' as a place where we may dare to aspire and unleash the 'fearful symmetry' of the imagination.

### Footnotes

[1] An accented syllable followed by an unaccented one.

[2] Discussed in Malcolm Peet and David Robinson, *Leading Questions* (Walton-on-Thames: Nelson, 1992), p.80.

[3] Two accented syllables.

[4] An unaccented syllable followed by an accented one.

[5] Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London: Minerva, 1996), p.149.

[6] Heather Glen, *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's 'Songs' and Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.19.

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- See more at: <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/an-introduction-to-the-tyger#sthash.wqMN63oG.dpuf>

Now that you have read the poem, viewed presentations of it, and read an academic discussion of it, brainstorm ideas for comparing and contrasting the poem and Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

