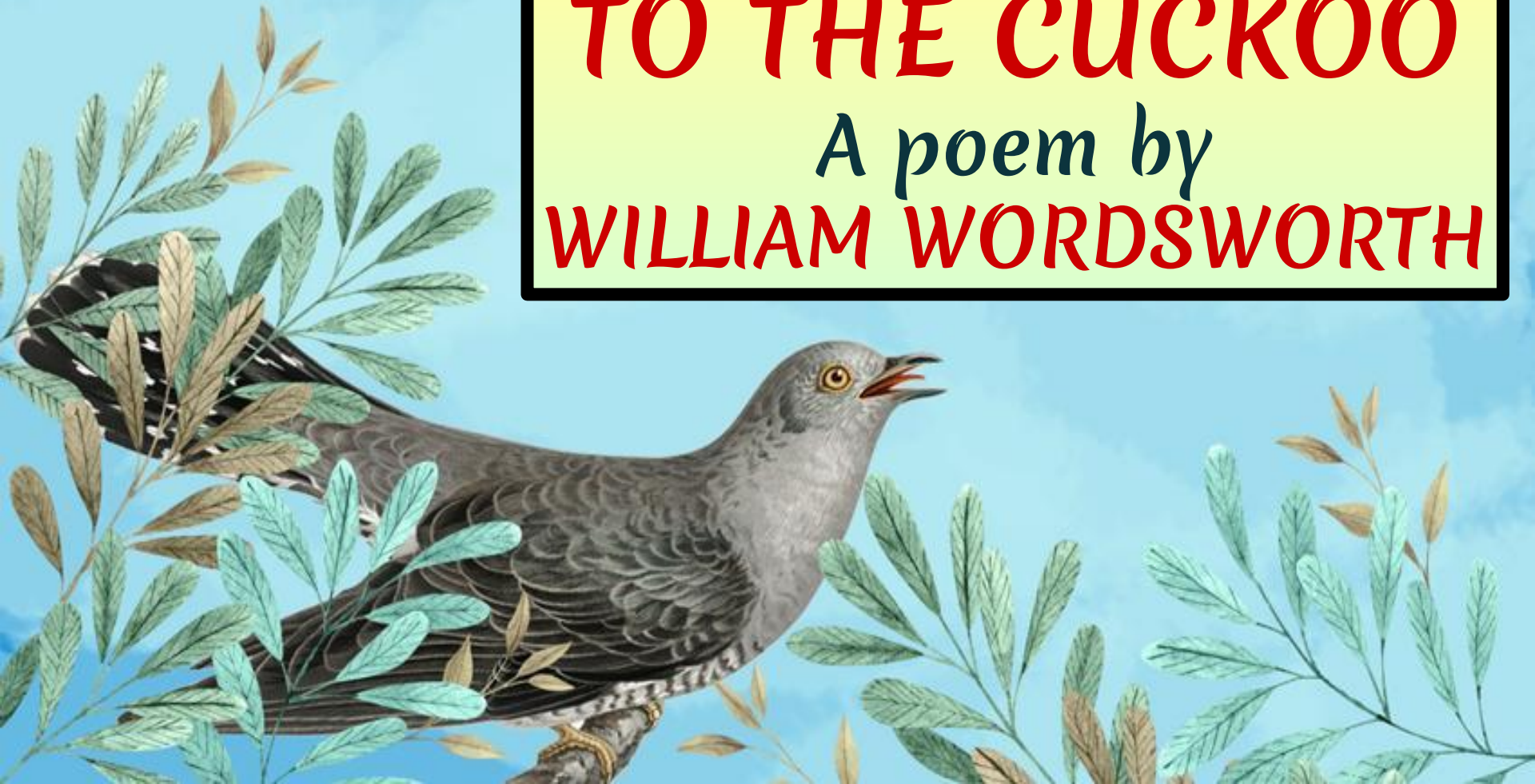


TO THE CUCKOO

A poem by
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH



PRE-READING ACTIVITY



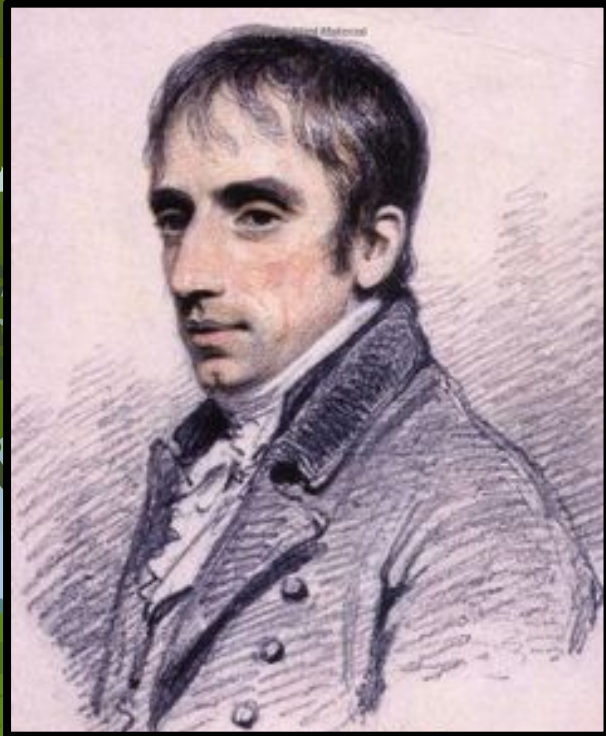
❖ Which is your favourite bird?

❖ Describe the qualities of your favourite bird.

❖ Narrate any childhood memory that is associated with your favourite bird/s.



ABOUT THE POET - WILLIAM WORDSWORTH



- ❖ Date of Birth: 7 April 1770
- ❖ Date of Death: 23 April 1850
- ❖ A major English Romantic poet who, with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, helped to launch the Romantic Age in English literature with their joint publication *Lyrical Ballads* (1798)

- ❖ Wordsworth wrote poems on various topics and a majority of them were about nature.
- ❖ Popularly known as a poet of nature - wrote poems portraying nature as something divine and spiritual.
- ❖ Famous works: *The Lyrical Ballads*, *The Prelude*, *Daffodils*, *The Solitary Reaper*, etc.
- ❖ *The Prelude* is considered to be Wordsworth's best work.
- ❖ He was England's Poet Laureate from 1843 to 1850.



ABOUT THE POEM

- ❖ William Wordsworth's 'To the Cuckoo' depicts the poet's adoration for the bird whom he has never seen but only knows through its voice.
- ❖ The poem reflects the poet's admiration of the Cuckoo as it brings back his childhood memories.
- ❖ Throughout the poem, the poet's tone is nostalgic and he welcomes the bird which is projected as a carefree, merry bird who is disconnected from the restraints of the materialistic life.





STANZA-WISE EXPLANATION

STANZA 1



GLOSSARY

- blithe: showing a casual and cheerful indifference considered to be callous or improper
- thee: you
- rejoice: celebrate; to feel happy
- wandering: to move aimlessly in a leisurely manner

STANZA 1 - EXPLANATION



- ❖ Wordsworth begins the poem by welcoming the cuckoo with a sense of familiarity as he knows the bird's cry.
- ❖ He addresses the cuckoo as a carefree newcomer who is not subject to the restrictions of human life. The cuckoo is merry and free from all worldly worries.
- ❖ As the bird has just migrated to the region in the season of spring, it has been called a 'New-comer'.
- ❖ The cuckoo bird's voice brings back joyous memories to the poet, and thus, he rejoices.

STANZA 1 - EXPLANATION

- ❖ The third and fourth lines of the poem suggest that the poet has never actually seen the bird and knows him only by his voice. He expresses this when he asks the cuckoo whether he should call him a bird or his identity will remain as that of a wandering voice.
- ❖ The third line can also be interpreted as Wordsworth wonders whether he should label the cuckoo as just a bird or is it a creature bigger than the realms of his comprehension.
- ❖ He calls it a '*wandering voice*' because it sings its song wherever it goes.
- ❖ The phrase '*wandering voice*' also makes the cuckoo independent with a free voice. The cuckoo is not subject to any restrictions.

STANZA 2

GLOSSARY

- thy: your
- twofold: having two parts



STANZA 2 - EXPLANATION

- ❖ Wordsworth says that he is lying on the grass when he hears the cuckoo's call.
- ❖ The voice of the cuckoo echoes, making it sound like two different voices.
- ❖ The cuckoo's cry echoes across the whole plane, passing from one hill to another and reaches the poet. This gives the impression of the voice being once close, then again far off.
- ❖ The poet is lying on the grass while hearing the cuckoo's song gives the reader an idea of how close and deeply attached to nature the poet is. The wandering cuckoo's song is everywhere, and it submerges the entire environment in its melody.



STANZA 3

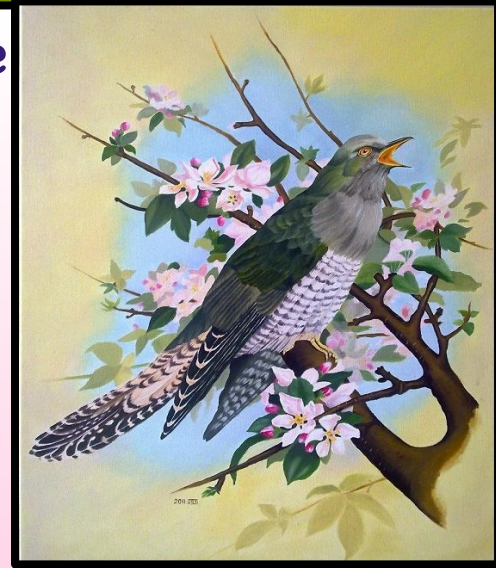


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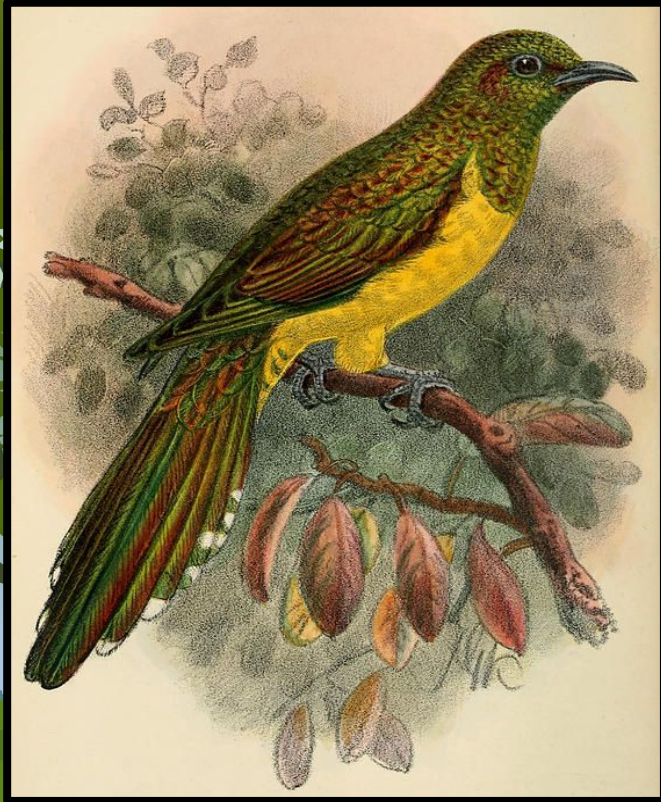
- babbling: the action or fact of talking rapidly and continuously in a foolish, excited, or incomprehensible way
- vale: a valley (used in place names or as a poetic term)
- thou: you
- bringest unto me a tale: narrate to me a story
- visionary hours- times from the past

STANZA 3 - EXPLANATION

- ❖ Despite singing to the valley and talking about sunshine and flowers, the cuckoo's voice brings many memories to the poet.
- ❖ The cuckoos wander about in the brimming valley with flowers and sunshine; thus, the bird's songs too are an ode to these aspects of nature.
- ❖ However, to Wordsworth, these songs have a completely different relevance. They act as an element of nostalgia, transporting the poet to days of his past.
- ❖ He calls those times '*visionary hours*' as he cannot go back to them in person and can only envision them from his memory. This indicates that the poet remembers the cuckoo from his childhood, and the cuckoo's voice now acts as a catalyst in bringing back the poet's memories of his childhood.



STANZA 4



GLOSSARY

- thrice: three times
- darling: used as an affectionate form of address for a beloved person/thing
- thou: you
- art: are
- invisible: something which can't be seen or touched

STANZA 4 - EXPLANATION

- ❖ Wordsworth welcomes the cuckoo thrice, indicating his excitement and eagerness.
- ❖ The cuckoo is addressed as the darling of the spring. It arrives with the beginning of the spring season, singing about valleys, flowers, and other beauties of nature.
- ❖ The poet also clearly states that he has never seen the cuckoo in reality. He recognizes it by its voice.
- ❖ Thus, the cuckoo is less of an actual living bird and more of a mysterious voice. The bird has been visually hidden from the poet through all these years, yet his song strikes such emotions in him that the poet remembers the cuckoo by its voice.



STANZA 5 - EXPLANATION



- ❖ In this stanza, the poet is transported to days of his childhood when he used to listen to the cuckoo's cry and go a thousand ways to find the source of the voice.
- ❖ He left no possible place undiscovered, be it the bushes, the trees, or the sky.
- ❖ The poet's tone is overtly nostalgic in these lines as he clearly expresses his unfulfilled desire to get a glimpse of the origin of the voice that he remembers from his boyhood.

STANZA 5 - EXPLANATION

- ❖ So desperate was the poet to locate the bird that he scoured all possible nooks and crannies in his endeavor to get visual satisfaction.
- ❖ The cuckoo's voice had fascinated the poet and fired his need to locate the bird so that he could see for himself the source of such melody.



STANZA 6



GLOSSARY

- seek: find
- rove: to move from one place to another
- green: fields
- thou: you
- wert: were

STANZA 6 - EXPLANATION

- ❖ Wordsworth addresses the bird, telling him how much finding him means to him.
- ❖ The poet constantly wandered, looking for the bird in the woods, anywhere and everywhere.
- ❖ This is an indication of the poet's dedication towards locating the source of the voice.
- ❖ Despite being unsuccessful in the past, the poet hasn't given up and says that he still hopes to find the bird.
- ❖ Wordsworth also reveals his love for the cuckoo. He now tells us that he did indeed love the bird and that's why he searched for it.
- ❖ He never found the bird but still yearns to. The poet hasn't lost hope yet and still wants to find the cuckoo.



STANZA 7



GLOSSARY

- thee: you
- beget: to bring about
- golden time: reference to the childhood of the poet

STANZA 7 - EXPLANATION

- ❖ With this stanza, the poet again travels back to the present and says that he can still listen to the cuckoo while lying on the ground and can produce the memories of his childhood, which he considers to be his 'golden time'.
- ❖ Just as gold is a precious metal, Wordsworth implies that his childhood was precious to him and that he wants to relive the moments of his schoolboy days by lying down on the grass and listening to the voice of the cuckoo.
- ❖ The poet is nostalgic and wants to conjure up memories of his childhood by relying on the cuckoo's cry.

STANZA 8



GLOSSARY

- pace: to move about
- unsubstantial: having little or no solidity, reality, or factual basis
- faery place: fairyland
- fit: proper; deserving
- thee: you

STANZA 8 - EXPLANATION

- ❖ The word '*blessed*' encompasses the poet's love and devotion towards the cuckoo.
- ❖ The cuckoo is addressed as a blessed bird. It is blessed with the quality of an angel or a fairy. It fills the world with joy and happiness.
- ❖ The earth where human beings live acquires a magical charm when the poet hears the beauty of the cuckoo's song.
- ❖ Wordsworth also calls the earth '*unsubstantial*' which is an unrealistic place of fairies.



STANZA 8 - EXPLANATION

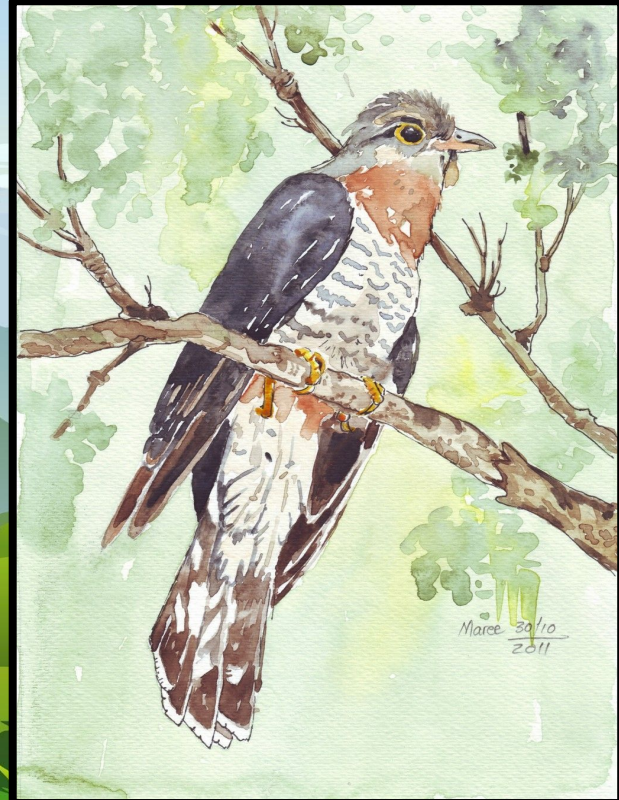
- ❖ This could be because the earth has mesmerizing elements of nature, like the sky, woods, rivers, valleys, but at the same time, is plagued by restrictions of industrial life which curbs the freedom of an individual.
- ❖ A place with such enchanting contradictions is a place that is fit for the cuckoo.
- ❖ The use of the term 'again' alludes to the fact that the earth takes on such a guise with the arrival of the cuckoo.
- ❖ The poet could also say that the earth, which is so versatile, is the perfect dwelling for the cuckoo as he too is full of contradictions.
- ❖ He stirs visions from the poet's childhood and makes him nostalgic, but is himself never to be seen.



SUMMARY AND THEME OF THE POEM

SUMMARY OF THE POEM

- ❖ Wordsworth's 'To the Cuckoo' celebrates the beauty of nature. It is poem of joy and happy memories.
- ❖ The little songbird, cuckoo comes to England in early spring. The poem begins with the poet welcoming the bird, calling him a "blithe newcomer", hence projecting an image of a carefree, joyous bird that is unrestrained by the bonds of a human materialistic life, and celebrates its freedom.
- ❖ He rejoices to hear the old familiar cry of joy that passes from hill to hill.



SUMMARY OF THE POEM



- ❖ He narrates how he comes across the cuckoo's song, while lying on the grass.
- ❖ He recognises the bird by his cry which echoes across hills and valleys.
- ❖ The cuckoo's song casts a spell over him and he is back in his childhood.
- ❖ It was the period of joy, wonder and innocence.
- ❖ He is happy on seeing the bird, but calls the bird 'wandering voice' as he has only heard his voice, but never seen the cuckoo.

SUMMARY OF THE POEM

- ❖ He confesses how the bird's songs take him back to his childhood and bring back memories of the days when he would go around trying to find the cuckoo.
- ❖ In those days, the songs of the cuckoo fascinated him. He wandered through greens and woods to catch a glimpse of the bird. He looked for the cuckoo in tree, bushes and in open skies but it was never seen by the poet.
- ❖ Even now when he is hearing it talk to the valley, he cannot see it. He wonders whether this is a real bird or only a wandering voice. This wandering voice still makes him forget everything and enter the world of imagination.
- ❖ The everyday world turns into a fairyland, and he becomes a child once again full of joy and wonder.



MAJOR THEMES IN THE POEM

❖ NATURE

Nature is a prevalent theme in the poem as the poet loves nature and talks about pastoral views such as hills, valley, flowers, sunshine, and woods.

❖ NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia is also a dominating theme in the poem as the poet walks down the memory lane and the cuckoo's voice leads him to the remembrance of the past. The poet calls his childhood period the '*golden time*' and '*visionary hours*' which he cannot get back as he is an adult now.

MAJOR THEMES IN THE POEM

◆ GAIETY

The tone of the poem is joyful as the poet is excited to welcome the bird and the spring season. The arrival of the cuckoo fills the poet with ecstasy as he can revisit his childhood memories.

◆ TIME

The poet relates the present to the past and the cuckoo transports him to the past memories.



MAJOR THEMES IN THE POEM



❖ INNOCENCE AND PURITY

As the poet expresses his feeling related to childhood, he actually draws a contradiction between the materialistic and mystical world. Childhood is a period of innocence and pure thoughts wherein a person is unaware of the materialistic world.



POETIC DEVICES IN THE POEM

ALLITERATION

Alliteration is a literary device in which the same consonant sound appears at the beginning of two or more successive or closely connected words in a line/sentence.

Examples: the sweet smill of success; green as glass, etc.

ALLITERATION IN THE POEM:

- a) Stanza 1: *have heard, wandering Voice*
- b) Stanza 2: *hill to hill*
- c) Stanza 8: *blessed Bird!*

METAPHOR

A **metaphor** is a figure of speech where comparison of two different things are implied but not clearly stated.

Examples:

- a) The classroom was a zoo.
- b) She is a peacock.
- c) My teacher is a dragon.
- d) The computers at school are old dinosaurs.

EXTENDED METAPHOR IN THE POEM:

- ❖ Wordsworth uses an extended metaphor in the entire poem to portray how he wants to find the bird '*still longed for but never seen*' which is almost like he is trying to find his freedom.
- ❖ This brings him back to the time when he was a child, '*the golden time again*' (Stanza 7) where he is young, innocent and most importantly evident in this poem, free.

ONOMATOPOEIA

Onomatopoeia is the process of creating a word that phonetically imitates, resembles, or suggests the sound that it describes.

Examples: hiss, shh, ding dong, gurgle, etc.

ONOMATOPOEIA IN THE POEM:

- a) Stanza 3: *Though babbling only to the Vale*
- b) Stanza 8: *O blessed Bird!*

The 'O' used to address the cuckoo is an actual sound that is made to call somebody, more commonly called "Oh!"

IMAGERY

Imagery is a poetic device which is created through word pictures. A poet uses descriptive language and figures of speech to form mental pictures which appeals to the senses of the readers and evokes their interest and pleasure.

IMAGERY IN THE POEM:

- ❖ William Wordsworth has used visual imagery throughout the poem 'To the Cuckoo' to create vivid mental pictures in the minds of the readers.
- ❖ The reader's mind is projected with the picture of Spring in England.
- ❖ The usage of words like sunshine, flowers, Vale (valley) creates a sunny and happy image.
- ❖ The constant reference to green fields and the cuckoo give this poem a pastoral touch and showcase the poet's attachment to nature.

HYPERBOLE

Hyperbole is a figure of speech which creates emphasis through the deliberate use of exaggeration.

HYPERBOLE IN THE POEM:

- ❖ William Wordsworth uses hyperbole in this poem by exaggerating the certain aspects of the cuckoo and nature.
- ❖ The earth is called an '*unsubstantial, faery place*'.
- ❖ This is to create an image of a mystical place and also, to add mystery to the cuckoo who the poet has never seen in actuality.

RHYME SCHEME

'To the Cuckoo' by William Wordsworth is a poem consisting of eight stanzas, each being a quatrain, that is, consisting of four lines. A rhyme scheme of ABAB is followed throughout the poem. Thus, the poem follows an alternate rhyme scheme.

EXAMPLE OF RHYME SCHEME IN THE POEM:

Stanza 1: *O blithe New-comer! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice.
O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,
Or but a wandering Voice?*

Thus, the rhyme scheme of Stanza 1 is abab.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

REFERENCE-TO-CONTEXT QUESTIONS (SOLVED)

*O blithe New-comer! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice.
O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,
Or but a wandering Voice?*

a) Who is the poet referring to as the 'newcomer'?

Ans. The poet is referring to the cuckoo as the 'newcomer'.

b) Why is the poet referring to it as the 'newcomer'?

Ans. The poet is referring to the cuckoo as the 'newcomer' as the bird has just migrated to the region in the season of spring.

REFERENCE-TO-CONTEXT QUESTIONS (SOLVED)

*O blithe New-comer! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice.
O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,
Or but a wandering Voice?*

c) What does the poet feel on hearing the song of the 'newcomer'?

Ans. The poet is feels happy and rejoices on hearing the song of the cuckoo.

d) Why is the poet referring to the cuckoo as 'a wandering voice'?

Ans. The poet calls the cuckoo a 'wandering voice' because it sings its song wherever it goes. The phrase 'wandering voice' also makes the cuckoo independent and with a free voice. The cuckoo is not subject to any restrictions.

REFERENCE-TO-CONTEXT QUESTIONS (UNSOLVED)

*Thrice welcome, darling of the Spring!
Even yet thou art to me
No bird, but an invisible thing,
A voice, a mystery;*

- a) Who is the 'darling of the Spring'?
- b) Why is it being welcomed thrice?
- c) What is the poet referring to as 'an invisible thing'?
- d) Why is it called 'a mystery'?

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS (SOLVED)

a) How does the cuckoo's voice charm the poet?

Ans. The cuckoo's voice made the poet very happy. He rejoiced when he listened to the sweet voice of the cuckoo as it reminded him of his beautiful days of his childhood.

b) What does the '*golden time*' refer to?

Ans. '*golden time*' refers to the poet's childhood days which was a period of joy, wonder and innocence. Wordsworth confesses that in those days, the songs of the cuckoo fascinated him. He wandered through greens and woods to catch a glimpse of the bird. He looked for the cuckoo in tree, bushes and in open skies but it was never seen.

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS (UNSOLVED)

a) How does the cuckoo's voice affect the poet?

b) How does Wordsworth portray the beauty of nature in the poem?

c) How did the poet enjoy his childhood days?

d) Why does the poet call the cuckoo the '*darling of the Spring*'?



THANK YOU!

