***The listeners***

**Symbols in The Poem:**

* **The Traveller**

The central character of "The Listeners," the Traveller, as a symbol for humankind as a whole. Nameless, he is defined by his journey, which makes him easy to read as a universal figure for a person traveling through life. He approaches the house in the forest on an undefined errand, which he is desperate to complete but ultimately unable to finish in a satisfactory way. This resonates with the idea of a human search for purpose that is ultimately thwarted.

Most compelling is his repeated question of "Is anybody there?" One may read this question to the human search for divine guidance, for the presence of a force operating the universe with intention.

* **The Listeners (allegorical)**

That the poem is named for the listeners immediately prompts the reader to see their part in the narrative as an allegorical representative of some larger meaning. But, like the poem itself, the listeners cannot be pinned down to any particular meaning. Most strikingly, they are mute, as, in a sense, is the poem in front of us—it cannot (or simply refuses to) give us a clear answer, either confirm or deny our reading of it.

o   **The Bird**

The bird is a symbol of the peace of the forest that is disrupted by the events in the poem. Not only does the Traveller appear to disturb its rest, sending it flying away, but the speaker appears to disturb its home and bring the forest and the listeners into the minds of the people "left awake."

o **The Horse**

Unlike the bird, the horse is a symbol of life, finding its home in the land of the living. It is the method the Traveller uses to arrive at and escape from the house, disturbing the eerie forest multiple times throughout the forest as though it does not at all feel the fear that his human master does.

**Summary**

-"The Listeners" relays the story of a traveller who knocks at a door of a house but nobody answers.

- It portrays the incidents that happen in the real world and the world of phantoms. The closed door in the poem signifies the gap between the two worlds.

-The traveller only met with silence when he knocks at the door. His horse champs the grasses while a bird flies over the roof of the house. The bird also flies above the traveller’s head. He goes ahead to knock a second time and inquires if there’s anybody in the house. Still yet, no one answers. The door remains closed.

-Meanwhile, there’s an indication that the house has remained uninhabited for years. Weeds have overgrown the entire area.

-The traveller becomes apprehensive when his second knock yields no result. He becomes impatient and fearful. Loneliness surrounds him and is perplexed. The only possible listeners around are phantoms or ghosts. They listen to the voice of the traveller coming from the world of the humans. It’s also a habitation for ghosts. The only possible listeners are ghosts. Hence, there exists a psychological communication between the traveller and the ghosts.

-Again, the traveller knocks louder and louder for the third time but no human voice answers. This time, the ghosts keep silent. He mounts back on his horse and rides away leaving the phantom listeners with a message.

The poet has deliberately kept the mystery unsolved, leaving it to  readers to find the answer.

“The Listeners” we have a hero whose mission is unknown, a journey whose beginning and end are a mystery, organized around a climax (his arrival at the house of the Listeners) that fails to occur.

The poem can be read many ways: as a drama of the modern individual confronting the anonymous “thronging” collective; as a commentary on the futility of action in opposition to fate (the Traveller is just as incapable of bringing an end to his mission, his searching, as the Listeners are of answering him; their fates are given in their names); or as about the fundamental isolation of the human condition, the “strangeness” of others.

Walter de la Mare’s poem is compelling and unsettling precisely because it keeps the reader “travelling,” so to speak, in search of an answer that never arrives.

* **Type of poem: Narrative-** A story which has a beginning, middle, climax and end. • It centres around a traveller’s encounter with the supernatural.
* **Narrator** - Third person
* **Setting & Tone:** Setting - Late on a moonlit evening at a dwelling in a forest. • The time is late 19th century – early 20th century. Tone - Serious and the atmosphere is eerie and otherworldly.
* **Atmosphere:**eerie and quiet.
* **Themes :**

**Mystery, Understanding, and the Unknown**

 “The Listeners” the poem suggests that people cannot always find the answers they seek, regardless of how hard they look. We sometimes sense that a ghostly presence is observing us.  Such moments tend to occur when the sun is down, the moon is up, and an eerie stillness surrounds us.  In “The Listeners”, the man identified as “the Traveller” senses that otherworldly beings are eavesdropping on him. He responds to them. They do not respond to him, however. They are only there to listen.

Mystery- The poem is metaphor for the mysteries we ourselves encounter as listeners or as callers rapping at a door. We go through life asking why, and then seek answers. But we do not always get them, whether we are looking for them in religion, science, social interaction, or in ourselves.

**Isolation and Loneliness**

 The poem creates a distinction between its isolated human subject, the natural world surrounding the abandoned home, and the spirits who do not answer the Traveller’s call.

The Traveller is distinctly human, and his physical efforts stand in contrast to the ghostly stillness of the listeners. He’s aware of another presence that doesn’t respond to these signals. On the other side of the door stand a group of phantoms—or spirits—who hear the Traveller but cannot or choose not to answer him. A failure of connection. The Traveller does not find the people he came to meet, and while the listeners are conscious of him, they are either unable or unwilling to answer his questions. Instead of talking to living people, he is forced to leave a message with ghosts.

**Rhyme Scheme : abcb**

**Figures of Speech:**

* **Imagery:** Audio and Visual – Audio: Knocking at the door, horse champing at the grass, bird flying, sound of hooves, sound of iron on stone
* Visual imagery- Moonlit door, forest ferny floor, leaf- fringed sill, the lone house, moonbeams on the dark stairs, staring phantom listeners, starred-leafy sky, empty hall.
* **Alliteration:** forest ferny floor, silence surged softly backward, suddenly smote, louder, and lifted his head.
* **Onomatopoeia:** sound words- champing, bird flying, knocking, hooves, thronging, echoing.

o Irony : The fact that the only “answer” given in the poem is a silent “stillness” is deeply ironic.

o   Personification - The listeners could be said to be a personification of the silence and emptiness of the house, or of death.

o   **Anaphora:** Repetition of phrases or words for impact / emphasis.

Eg: Is there anybody there?

o   **Paradox:** absurd or contradictory statement which, when analysed is found to be true.Eg. Stillness is giving an answer. Their stillness answering his cry.

Students make a note in their notebook.