



Alexander Selkirk

A. Lead-in :

How would you like to remain in loneliness, without any friends ?

How would you pass your time in a lonely place which is far far away from human habitation ?

Discuss with a friend your feeling of loneliness.

Now read the poem. Find out what the poem is about.

B. The Text :

I AM monarch of all I survey,
My right there is none to dispute,
From the centre all round to the sea
I am lord of the fowl and the brute.
O Solitude ! where are the charms
That sages have seen in thy face ?
Better dwell in the midst of alarms
Than reign in this horrible place.

I am out of humanity's reach,
I must finish my journey alone,
Never hear the sweet music of speech;
I start at the sound of my own.
The beasts that roam over the plain
My form with indifference see;
They are so unacquainted with man,
Their tameness is shocking to me.

Society, friendship, and love
 Divinely bestow'd upon man,
O had I the wings of a dove
 How soon would I taste you again !
My sorrows I then might assuage
 In the ways of religion and truth,
Might learn from the wisdom of age,
 And be cheer'd by the sallies of youth.

Ye winds that have made me your sport,
 Convey to this desolate shore
Some cordial endearing report
 Of a land I shall visit no more;
My friends, do they now and then send
 A wish or a thought after me ?
O tell me I yet have a friend,
 Though a friend I am never to see.

How fleet is a glance of the mind !
 Compared with the speed of its flight,
The tempest itself lags behind,
 And the swift-winged arrows of light.
When I think of my own native land
 In a moment I seem to be there;
But, alas ! recollection at hand
 Soon hurries me back to despair.

But the sea-fowl is gone to her nest
 The beast is laid down in his lair;
 Even here is a season of rest,
 And I to my cabin repair.
 There is mercy in every place,
 And mercy, encouraging thought !
 Gives even affliction a grace
 And reconciles man to his lot.

C. About the poet :

William Cowper (1731 AD to 1800 AD) was born at Great Berkhamstead, in Hertfordshire, where his father was a rector. His poems were published late in life. At the very end of his volume of poems a few miscellaneous short poems were also included. One of them is the well-known poem containing the reflections of Alexander Selkirk. The poem reflects the freedom of his spirit in a lonely island.

D. Glossary and Notes :

I AM	:	Here 'AM' is written in capital letters to emphasize the poet's feeling of confidence in his new role as the sole monarch of the lonely island.
monarch (N)	:	Supreme ruler
dispute (V)	:	argue or quarrel
brute (N)	:	animal or a beast.
solitude (N)	:	being without companion (here) – a lonely place.
thy	:	an old-fashioned, poetic or religious word for 'your'.
bestow (V)	:	give as an offering
assuage (V)	:	make suffering less painful
sallies (N)	:	Lively or humorous remarks

- desolate (Adj) : barren land, ruined or isolated.
 sea Fowl (N) : sea bird, one of the larger water birds.
 lair (N) : wild animals' resting place or den.
 affliction (N) : suffering or distress.
 reconcile (V) : bring into harmony.
 after : (here) refers to the thought about the poet

E. Let's understand the poem :

(a) Comprehension Questions for discussion

1. Who does 'I' refer to ?
2. Who is the monarch here ?
3. Who did find charm in solitude ?
4. Why were the beasts unfamiliar with Selkirk ?
5. What did Selkirk appeal to the wind ?
6. Which lines in the poem suggest that the island is a no man's island ?
7. What is the meaning of the line – “They are so unacquainted with man” in stanza – 2 ?
8. What hurried Selkirk back to despair ?
9. What did Selkirk want to do when evening approached ?
10. Can you choose an alternative title for the poem ?

(b) Choosing the appropriate answers :

1. The poem is about the plight of a person named _____.
 (a) Shakespeare (b) William Cowper
 (c) Alexander Selkirk (d) William Wordsworth
2. I am _____ of all I survey.
 (a) King (b) Emperor (c) Landlord (d) Monarch.

3. The beasts _____ over the plain.
(a) run (b) walk (c) move (d) roam
4. O had I the wings of a _____, How soon would I taste you again.
(a) crow (b) dove (c) owl (d) fowl
5. The _____ itself lags behind, And the swift winged arrows of light.
(a) tempest (b) cyclone (c) blizzard (d) wind
6. But the _____ is gone to her nest.
(a) sea horse (b) sea fowl (c) sea fish (d) Sea snake

F. Let's appreciate the poem :

1. What did the poet survey ?
2. Why did the poet remember the sages ?
3. How does the poet describe the island in the second stanza ?
4. What are the divine qualities bestowed upon man ?
5. Why does the poet like the wisdom of age ?
6. What is the poet's prayer to the 'winds' ?
7. Why does the poet say that "the tempest itself lags behind" ?

G. Let's Speak :

(a) Role-play the following a dialogue.

Selkirk – Why are you so indifferent to me ?

Beast – Because you are a man.

Selkirk – So what ? I am quite friendly.

Beast – Sorry, I am not acquainted with man.

Selkirk – Oh wind ! Please listen to me.

Wind – What can I do for you ?

Selkirk – Please convey my message to my friends as I am far away in this lonely island.

Wind – It's not possible. I can't cross my limit.

H. Let's Write :

Words having sameness of sound of the endings of two or more words are rhyming words. In this poem the words like '*face*' and '*place*' are rhyming words. Find out at least six pairs of such words from the poem.

Writing task

This poem is about a sailor named Alexander Selkirk. He swam to a lonely island after a ship wreck. That was a no man's island. Only beasts and birds lived there.

Think yourself as Selkirk and write in about ten lines describing your feeling of loneliness.

