

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM Worksheet

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Verse 1

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

Verse 2

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of
wondering love.
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on
earth!

Verse 3

How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is given;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His
heaven.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ
enters in.

Verse 4

Where children pure and happy pray to the blessed Child,
Where misery cries out to Thee, Son of the mother mild;
Where charity stands watching and faith holds wide the
door,
The dark night wakes, the glory breaks, and Christmas
comes once more.

Verse 5

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!

Vocabulary In one or two words define the following terms from the poem.

Verse 1: thee, thy, everlasting

Verse 2: mortals, watch, proclaim, holy, praises

Verse 3: Wondrous, imparts, blessings, sin, meek

Verse 4: blessed, misery, mild, charity, faith

Verse 5: descend, cast, tidings, abide, Emmanuel

Word Pictures Word pictures is another way of saying *imagery*. *Imagery* or *figurative language* helps us form a picture of what the author is trying to present. Discuss what these word pictures mean and, perhaps, draw your idea of the *imagery* or *figurative language* the author uses!

Verse 1: little town of Bethlehem; silent stars; dark streets shineth the everlasting Light

Verse 2: mortals sleep; angels keep their watch; morning stars ... proclaim the holy birth; peace to men on earth

Verse 3: human hearts; No ear may hear; world of sin; meek souls

Verse 4: happy children pray; misery cries out; charity stands watching; faith holds wide the door; dark night wakes; glory breaks

Verse 5: Cast out our sin; Christmas angels; great glad tidings tell

Mechanics are the nuts and bolts of a poem. Verbally discuss.

Who is the speaker? (Does the speaker have a specific personality or has the author remained in the background so the message of the poem will be more clear?)

What does the poem reveal about the speaker's character? (Sometimes, poems reveal nothing about the speaker's personal thoughts, feelings, or attitudes. Yet, the poem may demonstrate those character traits that are important to the author like courage, loyalty, perseverance, etc.)

Is the speaker addressing someone in particular or is it to anyone? (Sometimes poems are not directed to anyone in particular, but to anyone that may read it.)

Does the poem have a setting? (Does the author tell where the poem occurs? Is the poem about a specific event?)

Is the poem about a particular event? (Is the event past or present? If it is about a past event, does the remembrance of the event have a particular meaning to the speaker?)

Is the theme of the poem stated directly or indirectly? (Some poems are straightforward and are meant to be taken literally. In songs, the theme may be presented in the refrain or in the last few lines. Sometimes the theme is a little bit more difficult to discern as it is made with figurative language or symbols.)

What point of view or perspective is the speaker? (What meaning do you think the poem has for the author?)

How did you respond to the poem when you read it the first time? (Did your thoughts and feelings change after you took time to study it?)

Comprehension Questions Verbally discuss

Verse 1: Did you notice that the author used the terms “thee” and “thy”? Why do you think the author opted to use those words? What town is being sung about? Why? What does the author mean by “everlasting Light”? Why, do you think, “Light” is capitalized? Explain and discuss: “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight.”

Verse 2: Who was born? Who was the mother? Who is gathered above? Why is any of this important? What is being proclaimed? What do you think the author meant by the phrase “While mortals sleep”? What should be sung and to Whom? Why?

Verse 3: What does the author mean by “wondrous Gift is given”? Why is “Gift” capitalized? Explain: “No ear may hear His coming.” Who and/or What is to be received? Why? Who enters in? Why would this be important?

Verse 4: Who do the children pray to in this verse? Why? What cries out? Why was the term “Son” capitalized? Explain and discuss: “Where charity stands watching and faith holds wide the door, The dark night wakes, the glory breaks, and Christmas comes once more.” Why is this important?

Verse 5: Who is the “Child of Bethlehem” and why is “Child” capitalized? What is being asked of this “Child”? Why is this important? Explain and discuss: “Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.” Why do you think the author used the phrasing “Christmas angels” and what were (are?) their tidings? What does “abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel” mean? Why would the author use this phrase?

Did this historical event or message become more real to you after reading this poem? Why?

After reading this poem, what character traits did you think of? What does the Bible have to say about these character traits?

What Does the Bible Say?

Find Scripture proofs for each of the assertions or statements made for each of the five verses.

Re-read the Gospel accounts of the Nativity along with Isaiah 53.

The Author/Poet

Based on what you have studied about this poem so far, would you guess that the author was a Christian or a humanist? How did you arrive at your decision?

The name of the author for this poem or lyric is Phillips Brooks (1835-1893). He was born 13 December 1835, Boston, Massachusetts, and died 23 January 1893, Boston, Massachusetts. Brooks was called “the greatest American preacher of the 19th Century.” He attended Harvard University where they named the Phillips Brooks House after him. He was ordained as an Episcopalian priest in 1860 and, shortly afterwards, became the Rector of the Church of the Advent, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was also rector of Trinity Church of Boston.

Geography

Locate Boston, Massachusetts, Philadelphia, and Pennsylvania on a globe, map and atlas.

Challenge Locate Bethlehem on a map or in an atlas.

Compare/contrast weather from Bethlehem, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania with your own for one week. Make a meal from Bethlehem for your family.

Activities

1) Make your own book! Without making an image of Christ, draw pictures representing each verse. (Note: that will be five different illustrations). With construction paper and other items readily available at home, make a title page with the name of the song and the author’s name which will be your book’s cover. You may want to illustrate your cover and include this poem in your book.

2) Make your own play! Re-enact with your siblings or friends the event or message discussed in this poem. Keep it lively, simple, and short. You may want to end your play with singing a rousing chorus of this poem or reading Scripture verses. Videotape your creation.

3) Radio Drama! With a handheld tape recorder, create your own radio show dramatizing the historical event or message of this poem.

4) Be a Reporter! Either with your family camcorder or with a handheld tape recorder, “interview” various individuals connected with this poem (e.g., C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, Richard the Lionhearted, Sir Walter Raleigh, repentant sinner, etc.). In order to have the fast paced style of a reporter, watch and/or listen to the news with your parents’ permission. Keep the interviews lively, quick, and to the point.

Remain objective! Being objective means just reporting the facts and not giving your opinion of the situation.

5) What is one of the things you most enjoy? Is it literature? math? science? sports? cooking? Take that area of interest and relate that to this poem. If you enjoy dance, for example, develop a dance routine that physically expresses the sentiments of this poem. If you enjoy shop, create something out of wood that helps to clarify this poem. Do you enjoy creating stories? Write a story based on any time period you desire that expresses the sentiments of this poem. Do you enjoy creating things in the kitchen? Make an ancient meal from this time or develop your own meal that symbolizes the many different points this poem makes.

6) Poster. Create a poster illustrating the the author’s view of the impact of *O Little Town of Bethlehem*.

7) Scavenger Hunt. Go to the library to learn what you can about Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) and share it with your family. If possible, discover the story behind this poem.