

DESPERATE ROMANTICS

Reading Comprehension (higher)

Task 1: READING

Wordsworth's wrote a very large number of important poems, but the themes that run through Wordsworth's poetry, and the language and images he uses, remain consistent throughout his work. They are based on the ideas Wordsworth described in his work *Lyrical Ballads*. Here, Wordsworth argues that poetry should be written in the natural language of common speech, rather than in the overly elaborate style that was then considered "poetic." He argues that poetry should offer access to the emotions contained in memory. And he argues that the first principle of poetry should be pleasure, that the duty of poetry is to provide pleasure through a rhythmic and beautiful expression of feeling—for all human sympathy, he claims, is based on the principle of "the naked and native dignity of man."

Discovering "the naked and native dignity of man" is one of the main aims of Wordsworth's poetry, and he follows his own advice from *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth's style remains simply-spoken and easy to understand even today, though the rhythms and idioms of common English have changed from those of the early nineteenth century. Many of Wordsworth's poems deal with the subjects of childhood and the memory of childhood in the mind of the adult. In particular, he writes about childhood's lost connection with nature, which can be preserved only in memory.

Wordsworth's poems initiated the Romantic era by emphasising feeling, instinct, and pleasure above formality and protocol. More than any poet before him, Wordsworth gave expression to human emotion; his lyric "Strange fits of passion have I known," in which the speaker describes a dark fantasy he once had that his lover was dead, could not have been written by any previous poet.

Task 2: VOCABULARY

What do you think the following phrases might mean? Use the context to guess if not sure.

remain consistent
childhood

overly elaborate
emphasise

to bear a resemblance to sth
fits of passion

Task 3: DISCUSSION

Based on what you have read, what do you think Wordsworth means by "the naked and native dignity of man"?

DESPERATE ROMANTICS

Post-session Comprehension

Teachers' Notes

These activities have been designed to be used before the workshops as introduction and a way of getting students interested and a way to pre-teach vocabulary. You may also use the material as a follow up activity after the students have attended the event and see how much they remember!

Vocabulary definitions:

remain consistent

overly elaborate

to bear a resemblance to sth

childhood

emphasise

fits of passion

to stay the same

too complex

to look like sth

the time when sb is a child

to draw attention to something

sudden, strong emotions