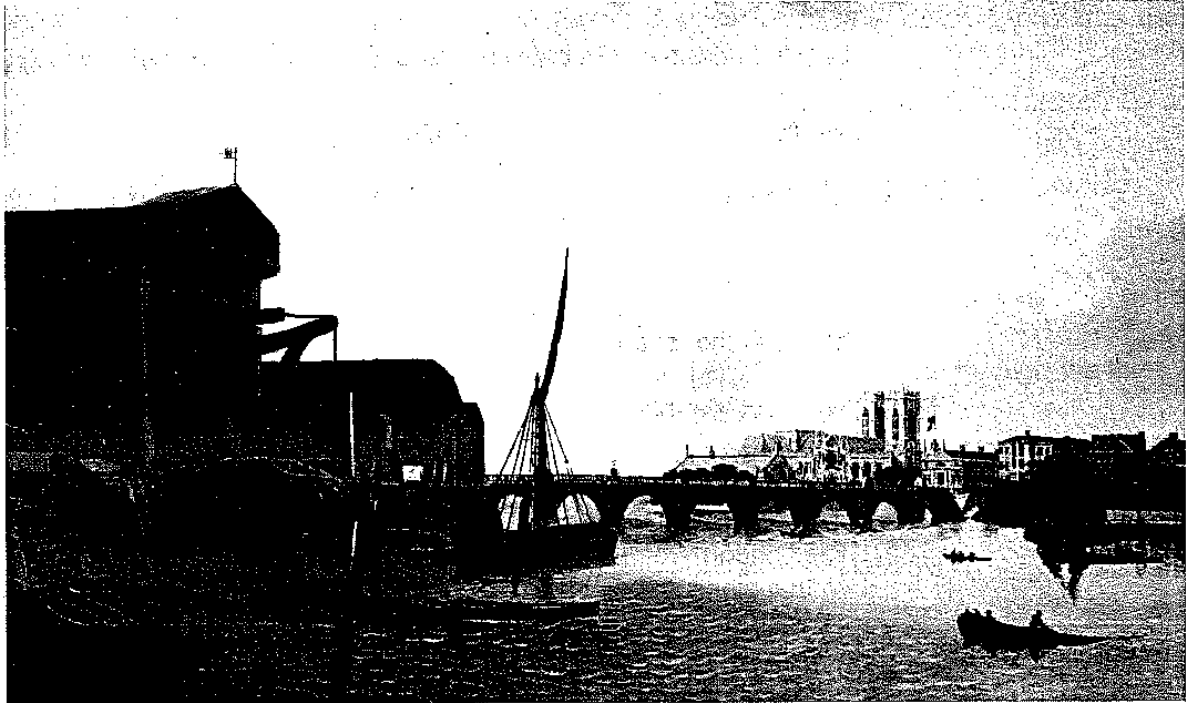


William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE,
SEPTEMBER 3, 1802



■ Westminster Bridge by Daniel Turner (active 1780-1810).

The background to the poem is a real experience Wordsworth had in 1802 while crossing Westminster Bridge in London with his sister Dorothy.

Text One

1 The poem describes a view of London.

Read the text and underline any word or phrase referring to the time of the day.
What time of day is it?

<p>Earth has not anything to show <i>more fair</i>: Dull¹ would he be of soul who could pass by² A <i>sight</i> so touching in its majesty: This City now doth, like a garment³, wear 5 The beauty of the morning; silent, bare⁴, Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie Open unto the fields, and to the sky; <i>All</i> bright and glittering in the smokeless air. Never did sun more beautifully steep⁵ 10 <i>In his first splendour</i>, valley, rock, or hill; Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep! The river glideth⁶ at his own sweet will: Dear God! the very houses seem asleep; And all that mighty <i>heart</i> is lying still!</p>	<p>more fair than...</p> <p>The sight of what?</p> <p>All refers to...</p> <p>In his first splendour: what time of day is it? I refers to...</p> <p>Whose heart?</p>
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1. *Dull*, insensitive, incapable of appreciating true beauty (insensibile).
2. *pass by*, pay no attention to, disregard (ignorare).
3. *garment*, item of clothing (abito).

4. *bare*, not covered with smoke or vapour (nitidi).
5. *steep*, pervade, bathe (avvolgere).
6. *glideth*, glides, moves smoothly (scivola).

2 Consider the elements of the city the poet mentions and the adjectives he uses to describe them.

a) Sort them out under the two headings, as suggested below.

ADJECTIVES	ELEMENTS OF THE CITY
bright	ships
.....
.....

b) Find possible links between the adjectives and put them into groups according to their meaning.

c) Which sense do they mainly appeal to?

3 What literary devices are used to convey the poet's view of London? Quote examples.

4 Now examine the tone of the poem.

- a) How would you describe the tone of lines 1-3?
- b) Does the tone vary in the remaining lines? How?

5 Work out the rhyme scheme.

- a) Can you recognise any conventional poetic form?
- b) Is there any relationship between the form and the meaning?

6 The London Wordsworth was familiar with was totally different from the London he saw on that glorious morning.

- a) From the poet's reaction what can you infer about the view he usually had of London?
- b) What transformation has London undergone in his eyes?
- c) What aspects of the poem make the reader feel that the poet refers to an actual experience?

7 If you have read the poem *London* by Blake, you can compare and contrast the two texts.

- a) In the table below indicate the bases of contrast you think most relevant for your analysis and write down a few notes about each poem.
- b) Then report on your findings (see Study skill card *How to Report*, p. 348).

BLAKE, LONDON, 1794	BASES OF COMPARISON/CONTRAST	WORDSWORTH, COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE, 1802
The poetic I	1 who the observer is	The poetic I
From its noisy crowded streets	2 where he views the town from	From a distance
	3 at what time of the day	
	4	

D1 CROSSING WESTMINSTER BRIDGE

from Dorothy Wordsworth, *Journals*, published in 1941.

Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy, recorded the crossing of Westminster Bridge in her journal.

1 Read the extract describing the experience and look for points of similarity and dissimilarity between it and the poem.

"It was a beautiful morning. The city, St Paul's, with the river and a multitude of little boats, made a most beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge. The houses were not overhung by their cloud of smoke, and they were spread out endlessly, yet the sun shone so brightly, with such a fierce light, that there was even something like the purity of one of nature's own grand spectacles" (31 July 1802).