

ODE: INTIMATIONS¹ OF IMMORTALITY FROM RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD (1803-1806)

The ode is a long poem in eleven stanzas about the process of growing up.

The poet has observed that in childhood we perceive a splendour in the objects of the natural world which fades away with the passing of time. The ode explains the reasons for this loss.

Stanzas I-IV look back to childhood when the natural world was transfigured by a "celestial light" which was everywhere. As the child grows up he loses his visionary power.

Stanza V accounts for this progressive loss of harmony with the natural world.



Text Two

- 1** Read the stanza and concentrate on the poet's view of human growth through the three stages of infancy, youth and manhood.
- What are the differences between the child, the youth and the man? Consider:
 - how close they are to God
 - how vividly they can admire and respond to the natural world.
 Add appropriate quotations from the text to back up your statements.
 - What images does the poet use to describe the growing process? Are they positive or negative?

V

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star²,
Hath had elsewhere *its* setting³,
And cometh from afar:
5 Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter⁴ nakedness,
But trailing⁵ clouds of glory⁶ do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
10 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy;
But He
Beholds the light, and whence⁷ it flows,
He sees *it* in his joy;
15 The Youth⁸, who daily farther from the east⁹
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest¹⁰,
And by the vision splendid
Is on *his* way attended¹¹;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
20 And fade into the light of common day.

The setting of...

it refers to...

his refers to...

1. *Intimations*, a fairly formal word meaning indirect signs that something is likely to be true (segni).
2. *Star*, here, the sun as a metaphor for the soul.
3. *setting*, origin (luogo d'origine).
4. *utter*, complete (completa).
5. *trailing*, dragging (trascinando).

6. *glory*, splendour (splendore).
7. *whence*, from where (da dove).
8. *Youth*, a young man (giovane).
9. *the east*, here the east refers to celestial light or divine origin.
10. *Nature's Priest*, here someone who worships Nature.
11. *attended*, accompanied (accompagnato).

- 2** Analyse the stanza once again.
- a) The poet mentions "clouds of glory" (l. 7).
- 1 What other words convey images of light?
 - 2 Have they all got the same intensity?
- b) Complete the paragraph below which outlines Wordsworth's philosophical view.
- When the child is born, he keeps recollections of his true home near (1) and can easily perceive the presence of (2) in the natural world around him. As he grows up the (3) of his response to the natural world declines. The "celestial light" he was able to see when a (4) is replaced by the light of (5) day.
- 3** "Intimations" in the title means 'signs'.
- In the light of what you have read so far about the ode what is the meaning of the title?