

Home pictures in May by John Clare – exploring the meaning

Name: Date:

Home Pictures in May

Choose the correct explanation from the table below to fit each of the underlined words or phrases and write it in the gaps provided.

The sunshine bathes everything in clouds of many hues and this morning our feet are gemmed with the early dews. All about the garden beds, warm daffodils peep their golden heads through their pale slim leaves.

The gosling broods are like sweet little earthly suns of the spring. They waddle about the road in ecstasy in their coats of sunny green. In rich moods , the old hen leads her flickering chicks abroad , though they often scuttle beneath her wings, seeing the kite wavering over them in the spring's blue light.

The sparrows chirp with glee round at their new nests and the robin also shares spring's sweet young luxury, tootling its song in the feathery gooseberry tree, while watching the worms that the gardener's spade unbares .

young geese	out and about	colours
moving about	look as if they are covered in gems	feeling contented
bird of prey	reveals	great joy

Teaching notes:

Poems about spring can be rather predictable so let's look at a poet who always writes about nature from close observation and without cliché. The poem can be read straight away and pretty much understood. Its subject matter – sunshine, dew, daffodils, geese, sparrows and robins – is familiar and can be easily illustrated (see PPT).

Closer reading can throw up difficulties. These are mainly due to some unfamiliar words (or unfamiliar usages of common words) and to word order. Changing word order to suit scansion and rhyme was common in almost all poetry until the last century and is rarely used now.

This resource offers a couple of ways of opening up the poem to new readers without going through explaining every line.

In the classroom

Read the poem aloud, perhaps displaying it at the same time. Then hide the text and ask pupils what they remember.

Home pictures in May

The sunshine bathes in clouds of many hues
And morning's feet are gemmed with early dews,
Warm daffodils about the garden beds
Peep through their pale slim leaves their golden heads,
Sweet earthly suns of spring – the gosling broods,
In coats of sunny green, about the road
Waddle in ecstasy – and in rich moods
The old hen leads her flickering chicks abroad,
Oft scuttling 'neath her wings to see the kite
Hang wavering o'er them in the spring's blue light.
The sparrows round at their new nests chirp with glee
And sweet the robin spring's young luxury shares,
Tootling its song in feathery gooseberry tree
While watching worms gardener's spade unbars.

John Clare

Home Pictures in May – untangled

Here is a version of the poem with the words and phrases in a more familiar order. Few grammatical changes have been made to make it read smoothly.

The sunshine bathes everything in clouds of many hues and this morning our feet are gemmed with the early dews. All about the garden beds, warm daffodils peep their golden heads through their pale slim leaves.

The gosling broods are like sweet little earthly suns of the spring. They waddle about the road in ecstasy in their coats of sunny green. In rich moods, the old hen leads her flickering chicks abroad, though they often scuttle beneath her wings, seeing the kite wavering over them in the spring's blue light.

The sparrows chirp with glee round at their new nests and the robin shares spring's sweet young luxury, tootling its song in the feathery gooseberry tree, while watching the worms that the gardener's spade unbares.

Share this version with the class and ask them to note any parts they don't understand. This should now mainly be a question of vocabulary. The text below has gaps after words or phrases which are likely to be problematic. In the Word document, the gaps contain a synonym or explanation which is written in white font and can be revealed by selecting the blank area and then changing font colour to black (or any other colour). If you are working from a PDF, you could create the document yourself from the table version which is provided as a worksheet.

The sunshine bathes everything in clouds of many hues _____ and this morning our feet are gemmed with the early dews. All about the garden beds, warm daffodils peep their golden heads through their pale slim leaves.

The gosling broods _____ are like sweet little earthly suns of the spring. They waddle about the road in ecstasy _____ in their coats of sunny green. In rich moods , _____ the old hen leads her flickering _____ chicks abroad _____ , though they often scuttle beneath her wings, seeing the kite _____ wavering over them in the spring's blue light.

The sparrows chirp with glee round at their new nests and the robin also shares spring's sweet young luxury, tootling its song in the feathery gooseberry tree, while watching the worms that the gardener's spade unbares _____ .

Now go back to the original poem and ask pupils to read it to themselves or to a friend. Are there any words or phrases which are still not quite clear? Do they understand the following usages?

- Oft
- O'er
- 'neath

Plenary

Using highlighters on paper or the highlighter tool in Word, ask pupils to pick out phrases which they think are effective, i.e. that they feel would enable the reader to imagine the scene described by Clare. In groups, ask them to see how far they agree, and to select two phrases per group. They may wish to edit their choices, for example, to select ‘the gosling broods ... waddle in ecstasy’. Each group will now read out their chosen phrases. Record them so that all can see the selections. There will be considerable overlap. Try to tease out what it is about some word choices that make writing effective, e.g. why waddle is better than walk, and so on. Display a copy of the poem in the classroom with selected words highlighted so that pupils can revisit it in the days that follow.

Extension

Here is another poem by Clare on the same topic which you may wish to share with the class. Once again, the power of the writing lies in the poet’s observation and his restricted use of adjectives: the strength lies in the nouns and verbs.

Spring

What charms does nature at the spring put on
When hedges unperceived get stained in green,
When even moss that gathers on the stone
Crowned with its little knobs of flowers is seen,
And every road and lane through field and glen
Triumphant boasts a garden of its own.
In spite of trembling horse with cart and plough
And nipping sheep and tented hungry cow,
The little daisy find a place to blow,
And where old winter leaves her splashy slough
The lady-smocks will not disdain to grow,
And dandelions like to suns will bloom
Aside some bank or hillock creeping low,
Though each too often meet and an hasty doom
From trampling clowns who heed not where they go.

Curriculum references

Y5-6: Reading

1. Maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by:
continuing to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks
2. Understand what they read by:
checking that the book makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and exploring the meaning of words in context
3. Discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader