

MIND MAP

SUMMARY OF THE POEM

In this poem, John Keats praises all the beautiful things present around us and the world. According to him, beautiful things get treasured in our mind and grow more beautiful with the passage of time. They provide eternal happiness, everlasting joy to us and leave their imprints on the mind of all human beings who hold a strong bonding with the earth. According to the poet, this earth has abundance of pessimistic people; hatred among the people and sadness that lurks everywhere in human's life. He holds humans responsible for every negative thing on this earth. According to him, only beautiful things can make our soul pure and thoughts alive.

The closing paragraph tells us of some of the beautiful things on Earth. The examples cited by the poet are the sun, the moon, trees, flowers, streams, musk-rose blooms, architectural sepulchers, even fairy tales or heroic legends. Keats sees beauty in the 'simple sheep; innocent humans seeking solace in nature, and Mother Nature in its own way sprouts a shady abode of relief and consolation. The expression 'Lily of the Valley' is quite well-known and rouses images of a delicate lone white flower holding up its head amidst a setting of thorns and barbs and everything contrary in nature to delicateness.

The poet also sees beauty in the death of martyrs and legends. 'The mighty dead' are those martyrs who have died bravely for a cause. We honour them by erecting magnificent, grand sepulchers in which beauty is seen. If one looks around, there are innumerable beautiful things to notice – they seem to flow immortally as a fountain, from the gods above to help the pitiable human beings to cope with the harshness of life.

4. A THING OF BEAUTY

ABOUT THE POET

John Keats, one of the supreme English poets and a major figure in the Romantic Movement, was born in 1795 in Moorfields, London. He was one of the main figures of the second generation of Romantic poets along with Lord Byron and P.B. Shelly despite his work having been in publication for only four years before his death.

Although his poems were not generally well received by critics during his life, his reputation grew after his death, so that by the end of the 19th century, he had become one of the most beloved of all English poets. He had significant influence on a diverse range of poets and writers. The poetry of Keats is characterized by sensual imagery, most notably in the series of odes. Today, his poems and letters are some of the most popular and most analysed in English literature. His notable works are: *To autumn*; *Ode to Nightingale*; *On first looking into Chapman's Homer*; *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

'A Thing of Beauty' is an excerpt from his poem, 'Endymion: A poetic Romance' (1818), considered to be an epic poem.

POETIC DEVICES/FIGURES OF SPEECH IN THE POEM

- Alliteration:** There are three pairs of alliteration – N-sound in "Noble" and "Natures" the C sounds in "Cooling" and "Covert" and B-sound in the words "Band" and "Bind".
- Metaphor:** Metaphor is evidently used in "bower quiet", "sweet dreams", "wreathing a flowery band". "pall" and "endless fountain of immortal drink".
- Imagery:** The immense use of imagery can be found in the phrase "flowery bands" which visualizes a bunch of flowers like a band. The use of the phrase "shady boon" also pictures the blessing to be shady. The words "daffodils in green world", "clear rills", grandeur of dooms", etc., are instances of use of imagery. "Cooling covert" and "endless fountain of eternal drink" are one of the notable examples of imagery used in this poem.

Reference to Context

Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow.

- I. A thing of beauty is a joy forever
Its loveliness increases, it will never
Pass into nothingness; but will keep
A bower quiet for us and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams and health and quiet breathing**
- How is a thing of beauty a joy forever?
 - Describe the kind of joy a beautiful thing provides.
 - Explain: “never pass into nothingness.”
 - What do you understand by a ‘bower’?
- II. Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the Earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o’er-darkened ways
Made for our searching.**
- What are the flowery bands that bind us to the Earth?
 - Why is there an ‘inhuman dearth of noble natures’?
 - What message do the above lines convey?
 - Explain ‘spite of despondence’. Why are we despondent?
- III. ...yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits.**
- Why are our spirits referred to as ‘dark’?
 - Explain: “Some shape of beauty.”
 - How does beauty help us when we are burdened with grief?
 - Identify the figure of speech in the second line.
- IV. ...Such the sun, the moon,
Trees old, and young, sprouting a shady boon
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear rills
That for themselves a cooling covert make
‘Gainst the hot season; the mid forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms;**
- What does ‘simple sheep’ symbolise’?
 - What images of beauty has the poet referred to?
 - How do ‘daffodils’ and ‘rills’ enrich the environment?
 - Explain: ‘the green world they live in.’
- V. And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
All lovely tales that we have heard or read;
An endless fountain of immortal drink,
Pouring unto us from heaven’s brink.**
- Who are the ‘mighty dead’? How do we know about them?
 - Which evil things do we possess and suffer from?
 - What is the thing of beauty mentioned in these lines?
 - What does Keats mean by ‘an endless fountain of immortal drink’?

ANSWER KEY

- I.** (a) A thing of beauty is the source of constant joy. Its beauty goes on increasing. It will never pass into nothingness.
 (b) Anything that is beautiful provides us an unending, everlasting and eternal joy. It leaves an indelible imprint on our heart and soul.
 (c) The joy that a thing of beauty give us is eternal. It never loses its importance and it only increases with time. It does not fade away or die out because it leaves an indelible imprint on our heart and soul.
 (d) A bower is a pleasant place in the shade under a tree. It protects persons/animals from the hot rays of the sun.
- II.** (a) Here beautiful and pleasant things have been referred to as flowery bands. It is only those things which have beauty of some or the other kind that bind us to this Earth, or in a way, keep us going. The memory of our beautiful experiences helps us strengthen our bond with the Earth.
 (b) Nowadays, there are only few people who are noble in character and are generous. There is a dearth of such noble souls on our earth; as these days people are mostly selfish and do not think about others.
 (c) The above lines convey that life is full of sadness and hopelessness. People have become selfish, and there is a scarcity of noble people.
 (d) It means despite the existence of gloom and darkness around, things of beauty make life on earth worth living. We possess the evil qualities of malice and suffer from the lack of noble qualities. That is why, we feel despondent.
- III.** (a) Our spirits are dejected due to extreme sadness and disappointment which may be the result of our own evil actions. So, the poet refers to them as dark.
 (b) Beauty is an abstract idea and has no specific shape. The poet here means beauty in some form or some beautiful object which provides us eternal joy.
 (c) Whenever we look at a beautiful object, we are filled with comfort and joy. When we are burdened with grief, a thing of beauty comes as a ray of hope, and makes us forget our sorrow and suffering at least for some time.
 (d) The word ‘pall’ in the second line is an example of metaphor. Our souls are covered in sadness and disappointment which are compared to a pall or shroud covering the dead.
- IV.** (a) Sheep and lamb are envisioned as symbols of innocence and serene beauty. Jesus Christ was a shepherd and was surrounded by his flock of sheep, his followers. Keats has made special reference to the sheep as symbols of divine beauty.
 (b) The poet appreciates the simplicity and serenity of beauty through an image of the sun, the moon, the trees, the sheep, the daffodils, the green pastures, the livid streams, and a fair bloom of musk-roses.
 (c) Daffodils bloom among the green surroundings. The clear water rills or small streams offer a cooling shelter in the hot season.
 (d) Beauty of nature is at its best in the green surroundings of meadows and pastures which provide support to all human beings. It is in the green world that all living creatures find true happiness and joy and feel relaxed.
- V.** (a) Our ancestors, who were great in their own ways, and the dead emperors have been referred to as the mighty dead. We come to know about them by reading or hearing valorous tales, which speak of their gallantry and exalted sacrifices. They are a source of motivation and inspiration for us through their sagas of their noble deeds.
 (b) Jealousy and hatred fill our lives with sadness and take away our carefreeness. These are the evils which make us suffer in life.
 (c) The thing of beauty mentioned in these lines is the multitude of stories celebrating the glory of our powerful ancestors, which we have read or heard.
 (d) Beauty, according to Keats, is a perennial source of motivation and inspiration. He considers it an endless fountain from which mankind can drink the elixir of life.