

MATERIAL FOR LESSON 1 OF VICE AND VIRTUE

King Canute on the Seashore

A hundred years or more after the time of Alfred the Great there was a king of England named Canute. King Canute was a Dane, but the Danes were not so fierce and cruel then as they had been when they were at war with King Alfred.

The great men and officers who were around King Canute were always praising him. "You are the greatest man that ever lived," one would say. Then another would say, "O king! there can never be another man so mighty as you." And another would say, "Great Canute, there is nothing in the world that dares to disobey you."

The king was a man of sense, and he grew very tired of hearing such foolish speeches. One day he was by the seashore, and his officers were with him. They were praising him, as they were in the habit of doing. He thought that now he would teach them a lesson, and so he told them to set his chair on the beach close by the edge of the water.

"Am I the greatest man in the world?" he asked.

"O king!" they cried, "there is no one so mighty as you."

"Do all things obey me?" he asked.

"There is nothing that dares to disobey you, O king!" they said. "The world bows before you, and gives you honor."

"Will the sea obey me?" he asked, and he looked down at the little waves which were lapping the sand at his feet. "Sea," cried Canute, "I command you to come no farther! Waves, stop your rolling, and do not dare to touch my feet!"

But the tide came in, just as it always did. The water rose higher and higher. It came up around the king's chair, and wet not only his feet, but also his robe. His officers stood about him, alarmed, and wondering whether he was not mad.

Then Canute took off his crown and said, "I shall never wear this again." Speaking to his men, he said, "Learn a lesson from what you have seen. There is only one King who is all-powerful, and it is he who rules the sea, and holds the ocean in the hollow of his hand. It is he whom you should praise and serve above all others."

Short Answer Questions

Write out your answers in complete sentences on a separate piece of paper.

1. What kingdom did Canute rule over?

2. Describe Canute's great men and officers and how they treated their king.
3. Did Canute really think he could command the sea?
4. What exactly did Canute show to his men at the shore?

Literary Words: Figure of Speech and Apostrophe

It may have seemed very strange to read about a Danish king talking to the sea. In the story, however, Canute is making the point that it is ridiculous to expect the "ears" of the sea to be attentive to an earthly king's voice. Only God can control nature. Although we do not address the sea, a tree, a bird, death, life, liberty, nature, etc. in real life, poets and other writers can address them in a figure of speech.

Have you ever said something you really didn't mean? We do this all the time, as in the sentence, *Stay away from Billy because he's a bear when he gets angry*. The speaker in this sentence is using a **figure of speech**. A figure of speech is language that means something other than what it says. An opposite word to figurative is **literal**. When someone uses literal language, he means exactly what he says. We know that the word *bear* must be a figure of speech because a boy cannot really turn into a bear when he is angry.

An **apostrophe** is one kind of figure of speech in which a speaker is talking to something that cannot talk back. When the Apostle Paul says, for example, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" he is not talking to death and the grave really. He is really making a statement about death. You can find Paul's statement in the New Testament of the Bible, specifically 1 Corinthians 15:55. Can you tell the literal meaning of Paul's statement in your own words?

Vice and Virtue: Knowing Ourselves

The story of Canute is about a very great king who "knew himself" in the Greek sense of the phrase. Probably one of the most important **dictums**, or proverbs of life, of the ancient Greeks was to "know yourself." The dictum was carved on a temple at Delphi. What does it mean—*know yourself*? Read the Greek myths and you will find out. The Greek myths are filled with people who did not know themselves and suffered greatly for it. Ajax in Homer's *Odyssey* did not know himself and was destroyed. Niobe, too, was punished for not knowing herself. Oedipus the king of Thebes had solved the riddle of the Sphinx but did not know himself and later suffered blindness and exile. To the Greeks knowing

ourselves meant knowing that we are only human. We are proud, but of what? We are not immortal gods. We fail. We experience pain and suffering. We will die one day. It is important to *know yourself*, say the Greeks, before the rude awakening.

Do you know that you are not perfect? That seems like a silly question, but we often act as if we are. We are proud, and sometimes forget that we were formed from the dust and one day will return to it. The only one who is perfect is God, and he is the only one that deserves honor and glory for who he is. The Apostle Paul said that a man should only “boast in the Lord.”

The Lowest Place By Christina Rossetti

Give me the lowest place: not that I dare
Ask for that lowest place, but Thou hast died
That I might live and share
Thy glory by Thy side.

Give me the lowest place: or if for me
That lowest place too high, make one more low
Where I may sit and see
My God and love Thee so.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The first line of this poem is stated in the form of a ____.
 - a) proud statement
 - b) humble request
 - c) denial
 - d) question
 - e) complaint
2. What is not true of this poem?
 - a) The first half of lines 1 and 5 of the poem are the same.
 - b) In line 1 of the poem, the words that get a stress are *give*, *lowest*, *place*, *not*, and *dare*.
 - c) In line 2 of the poem, the words that get a stress are *ask*, *lowest*, *place*, *Thou*, and *died*.
 - d) The first four lines of the poem are opposite in meaning to the last four lines.
 - e) The poem is in a form of a prayer.
3. Which of the following best tells what the poet is trying to say?
 - a) Humble people are successful in this world.
 - b) If you want to be humble, you must not act important.
 - c) Pride comes before a fall.
 - d) A person with a humble heart will see God in death and in life.
 - e) Pride is ugly.

4. What of the following best identifies the “lowest place” that is talked about in the poem?
 - a) a place on earth
 - b) a place in heaven
 - c) a place of humbleness
 - d) a place where the speaker can love and hope
 - e) a place where the speaker can be well again and live
5. Why does the speaker of the poem not “dare” to ask for the lowest place?
 - a) The lowest place is where the speaker can see God, and this is a favored place.
 - b) The lowest place involves humility, something the speaker is not willing to have.
 - c) The speaker is too proud to sit in the lowest place.
 - d) The speaker is frightened to sit in the lowest place.
 - e) The lowest place is a place where one cannot see God.

Literary Words: Climax and Anticlimax

The word **climax** is an easy word to remember because it is like *climbing* a ladder. A sentence with a climax leads up to something high and big. One famous climax found in the Bible is a passage written by the Apostle Peter. Peter urges Christians to add virtue to their faith, to add knowledge to virtue, to add temperance to knowledge, and so on, ending with love. The Apostle Paul tells us that *love* is the greatest of the triad—faith, hope, and love. Love is therefore the highest rung of the ladder that has faith as the bottom rung or starting point. There are seven rungs to Peter’s “ladder,” or climax.

Christina Rossetti, however, does not have a climax in her poem, but an **anticlimax**. Look at the second and third lines of Christina Rossetti’s poem “The Lowest Place.” She writes, *not that I dare ask for that lowest place*. We expect the poet to dare for something big, as the word *dare* is used for great, mighty, high, difficult, honorable and wonderful things. But there is an anticlimax here in the poet’s prayer. This ladder does not go up, but rather down. The poet cannot dare ask for the *lowest* place.

We can explain the anticlimax in Christina Rossetti’s poem this way. The lowest place, in fact, is something *high*. How so? It is the place that Jesus took when he died on the cross for people’s sin. The cross was his shame but also his

glory. His shame because it involved suffering; his glory because it won salvation for his people. The poet does not dare take the lowest place because to do so would be to take Christ's position. However, the speaker in the poem is thankful that by Jesus' lowering himself, we can, by his grace, be by his side.

Poetry Memory Work

Consider

By Christina Rossetti

Consider

The lilies of the field whose bloom is brief:—

We are as they;

Like them we fade away,

As doth a leaf.

Grammar and Punctuation 1

The Sentence

What is a sentence? Perhaps you would be able to recognize one, but can't tell what one is. You should be able, however, to give a working definition: *A sentence is a group of words that has a complete subject and a predicate and expresses a complete thought.* The subject answers the question *who* or *what* the sentence is about. Sometimes there is more than one subject in a sentence. In such a case, we say that the sentence has a **compound subject**. The predicate part finishes the sentence and contains the verb. In the following sentence, the subject is underlined once and the predicate is underlined twice.

Example of a Sentence

Nelson and his family visited our family in July.

To find the complete subject, you ask, "Who or what is the sentence is about?" The answer to that question is *Nelson and his family* (underlined once). You will notice that the predicate *visited our family in July* (underlined twice) finishes the sentence and contains the verb *visited*. (A verb shows action or being. The words *jump*, *drive*, *roll*, *is*, and *am* are all verbs.) Notice that when they are together, the subject and predicate express a complete thought. Read the following and see if you can tell which one is a sentence.

1. Made a shed in the backyard for his tools.
2. Anna's sister sewed a dress.
3. Because she was swimming downstream in the dirty river.
4. At Ridley Creek State Park in the rain.
5. Jonam working at the farm in Kimberton.

Were you able to tell that sentence 2 expresses a complete thought, while the the others do not? It contains both a subject and predicate and expresses a complete thought. The rest are fragments because they lack a complete subject (1), a predicate (5), or both (4), or do not express a complete thought (3). Here is sentence 2 written again with the **complete subject** underlined once, and the **predicate** underlined twice: Anna's sister sewed a dress.

Exercise 1.1

Underline the subject of the sentence once and the predicate twice. Make sure that every word of the sentence is underlined. The first one has been completed for you.

1. The lion roared inside its cage.
2. Tim's bicycle cost \$500.
3. The huge boulder was rolling down the steep hill.
4. Bill found a ballpoint pen under the sofa.
5. Frankie's sailboat was freshly painted.
6. The supermarket clerk gave the girl a balloon.
7. Standing behind a tree, Joshua hid from his friends.
8. We awoke from the loud thunder.
9. The angry old man in the car yelled at the pedestrian.
10. I forgot to bag the mayonnaise at the store.

Exercise 1.2

After each of the following, write "F" if it is a fragment and "S" if it is a sentence. The first one has been completed for you.

1. Outside the house. F
2. Is giving a present for his birthday.
3. Samuel daydreamed in the backseat of the car.
4. Could John pay for the candy with his own money?
5. Our blue van needed repair.
6. To listen to music at the concert hall?
7. Camping in a ragged tent on the hill.
8. George's aunt from Idaho.
9. Angry that his brother had taken his penknife without asking.
10. The old woman recovered from her illness.

Exercise 1.3

Sometimes a fragment has a subject and a verb but doesn't express a complete thought because it has a "dependent word." Dependent words include such words as *because, if, when, where, although, while, since, and, but, for, yet, or,* and *which*. Cross out the dependent words in the following fragments to make them sentences. The first one has been completed for you.

1. If You took the bus this morning.
2. When it was evening time and I went out on the empty beach.
3. But he noticed even though you tried to hide it from him.
4. Although Sam was not wealthy.
5. Yet he wasn't happy about the situation.
6. While Bob was studying and Mary was reading her book.
7. Since my friend Karen and I like to do play the same games.
8. While I was eating my breakfast.
9. And George was a fast eater.
10. Because he was tired from swimming so long in the hot sun.

Poetry and Poetics 1

What a Poem Looks Like

You may have noticed that poems are very different from “regular” kinds of writing—chapter books, modern plays, essays, newspaper articles and stories. One difference is that regular writing, called *prose*, looks different from poetry. One kind of poem, called a shape poem, illustrates this very well. A shape poem, also called pattern poetry, is shaped into a recognizable object, such as the wings of a bird or an altar of sacrifice. The most famous English poems are “Easter Wings” and “The Altar,” both written by George Herbert. Shape poems, however, are rather rare in English poetry.

A more commonly noticed difference in appearance between prose and poetry is that the one is divided into paragraphs, while the other is divided up into *stanzas*. Paragraphs in prose are divided by indentations, or spaces before every first line. There is one main idea for each paragraph. When a writer begins a new idea, he must begin a new paragraph. Stanzas of poetry, however, are not divided by indentations, but are separated by spaces between them. Look at the following poem by Emily Dickinson, titled “Dawn.” Can you tell how many stanzas there are in the poem?

When night is almost done,
And sunrise grows so near
That we can touch the spaces,
It's time to smooth the hair

And get the dimples ready,
And wonder we could care
For that old faded midnight
That frightened but an hour.

There are exactly two stanzas in “Dawn,” and each of the stanzas contains four lines. You will notice that after the fourth line of the first stanza there is a space to separate it from the second. You will also notice that the lines of the poem do not extend to the very right of the page as they do in prose. Although some lines of poetry may be longer than the lines in this poem, generally they are much shorter than the width of a page. The American poet Oliver Wendell Holmes once said in so many words that the length of a line is the length of

what the poet may naturally say without taking a breath. Read Emily Dickinson's poem out loud yourself and see if he is right.

In addition to stanzas and line length, poems are different from prose works in that they often are much shorter and sometimes contain unusual punctuation. One twentieth-century American poet named E. E. Cummings made his trademark in the placement of commas, periods and words as well as his use of lower case letters (he didn't use capitals). Some believe that these strange aspects of his poetry forced the reader to pay closer attention to what he was trying to communicate. Others believe it was a gimmick or trick that did not serve much use. Whatever the case, it certainly has made him stand out from other poets. But there are more important differences than how the poem appears on the page that we will discuss later.

One of the most famous poems written by the modern American poet William Carlos Williams is "This Is Just to Say." Although it is written as a three-stanza poem, it really reads like a hastily written note that would be taped on the door of a refrigerator. It consists of three separate sentences, in which the speaker says that he has taken some plums out of the "icebox," or refrigerator, and eaten them and then says that he is sorry with an explanation that he could not stop himself from taking them, as they were so "sweet" and "cold." If it had been written out as prose, extending to the right end of the page, "This Is Just to Say" would seem like an ordinary note. However, as it is written out in stanzas with very short lines and unusual punctuation, the reader is encouraged to think beyond the poem's obvious meaning. Do the plums represent something else? What does the speaker mean when he says the plums were *sweet* and *cold*? Is he saying stolen pleasures are sweet? Is the speaker calling the person that he is writing the note to sweet but "cold"?

One of the most remarkable aspects of "This Is Just to Say" is what happens when a reader reads it. Basically, three common sentences are put into stanzas with short lines and *voilà*, the work becomes a poem—and one of the most popular and talked about poems of the twentieth century! Williams' poem is a good illustration of the common understanding of poetry's power to suggest something other than what it says on the surface—to go beyond the obvious. While prose is direct and says what it means, readers expect poetry to be *suggestive*. "This is Just to Say" may not be the most beautiful poem, but it is a clever poem. Williams was able to use the readers' expectations regarding

poetic form to transform his ordinary, nothing-special-about-it refrigerator note into poetry!

Exercise 1.1

Be able to answer the following questions orally.

1. Mention specific differences between prose and poetry as it appears on the page.
2. What are some examples of prose works?
3. Who was Oliver Wendell Holmes and how did he explain the length of lines of poetry on the page?
4. What is so unusual about E. E. Cummings' poetry? Read "In Just" by E. E. Cummings and write down three examples of some of the unusual aspects discussed in this lesson.
5. What is so strange about William Carlos Williams' poem? Is it prose or poetry? Explain your opinion.

Exercise 1.2

Write out a simple note to a family member or friend and write it in stanzas, using short line and unusual punctuation. Show this simple note and calling it a poem, ask someone to tell you what it means. Do not reveal that you have written it.