

THE SOLITARY REAPER

► By William Wordsworth

Summary

'The Solitary Reaper' is William Wordsworth's rendition of the delight a simple peasant girl derives from nature and how the entire atmosphere reverberates with that happiness.

The poet sees a highland girl reaping the harvest and singing. The poet compares her song with the song of a nightingale, soothing his sorrows, easing his weariness, just the same way as the nightingale welcomes the weary travellers in the shady oasis of the Arabian sands. The maiden's song is also compared to the song of the cuckoo bird which is the harbinger of summer and ushers in happiness. The song of the maiden is as thrilling and persuasive as the song of the cuckoo bird which is effective enough to break the silence of the seas.

The poet cannot understand the dialect of the song, he is unable to comprehend its meaning, but is able to gauge from its sad tone that it probably relates to some unhappy memory, some battles fought long ago. The poet also feels that the song may be about the commonplace things like joys or sorrows.

The poet feels that the girl's song would have no end and would continue forever. The poet saw the girl singing as she bent over her sickle. The song of the maiden was so mesmerising and spellbinding that it held the poet motionless and still. When the poet started mounting the hill, the song could not be heard but it left an indelible mark on the poet's heart. For the poet, it would always remain a fresh evocative memory. The poem also shows how the appeal of music is universal.

सारांश

विलियम वर्ड्सवर्थ की सुप्रसिद्ध कविता "द सॉलीटरी रीपर" एक सीधी-साधी किसान कन्या का वर्णन करती है जो प्रकृति के समीप रहकर अत्यन्त प्रसन्नता का अनुभव करती है। उसकी यह खुशी, प्रसन्नता सारे वातावरण में गूँजती है।

सुबह सैर करते हुए, कवि एक पर्वतीय लड़की को फसल काटते और गाते हुए देखता है। वह उसके गाने को बुलबुल के गाने

से तुलना करता है। लड़की का गान, कवि की थकान और परेशानियों को उसी प्रकार दूर करता है जिस प्रकार बुलबुल का गाना थके हुए यात्रियों की थकान अरब के मरुस्थलों में दूर करता है और उन्हें यह सूचना देता है कि नखलिस्तान सामने है (रेगिस्थान में पानी पेड़ का प्रदेश, मरुद्यान) वह युवती के गान का कोयल के गाने से भी तुलना करता है। कोयल शीत ऋतु के अन्त और बसन्त ऋतु के आने की घोषणा करती है और शीत ऋतु के मौन का अंत करती है। युवती का मधुर गीत बुलबुल और कोयल दोनों से अधिक प्रभावशाली है और अधिक प्रसन्नता बिखेरता है।

कवि, युवती की भाषा समझने में असमर्थ है। उसे गाने से यह नहीं मालूम पड़ता कि वह किस विषय के बारे में गा रही है – क्या वह किसी युद्ध के विषय में गा रही है। क्या वह किसी दुखान्त घटना के बारे में गा रही है? और क्या उसका गाना रोज होने वाली किसी प्रिय अथवा अप्रिय घटना के बारे में है?

कवि को ऐसा प्रतीत होता है कि युवती का गाना कभी खत्म नहीं होगा वह निरन्तर गाती रहेगी। वह लड़की झुककर फसल काट रही है और साथ-साथ गा भी रही है उसका गाना इतना मधुर और मनमोहक था कि कवि मंत्रमुग्ध होकर बिना हिले, अचल होकर उसे सुनता रहा। जब कवि ने अपनी यात्रा पुनः शुरू करी और वह पहाड़ी पर चढ़ने लगा तो वह उसका गाना नहीं सुन सका। परन्तु उस संगीत ने कवि के हृदय पर न मिटने वाला असर छोड़ा। वह जब भी अकेला होता है तो युवती के संगीत को स्मरण करके फिर से मंत्र-मुग्ध हो जाता है।

कवि संगीत के प्रभाव, उसके सार्वभौमिक विश्वव्यापी शक्ति को सामने लाना चाहता है। संगीत अत्यन्त प्रभावशाली है, उसकी कोई भाषा नहीं है उसका अपना आकर्षण है जो हृदयस्पर्शी है।

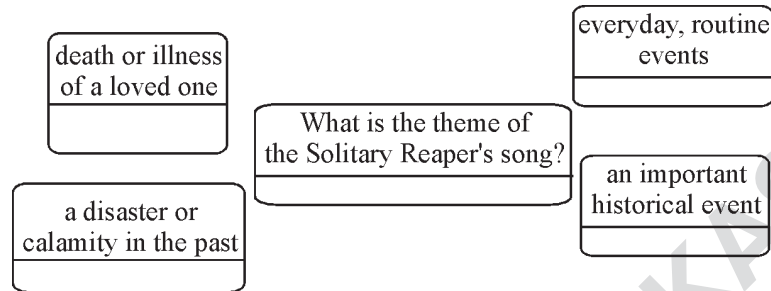
Word-Meaning

- **Behold** – see, just look
- **Solitary** – alone
- **Yon** – distant
- **Welcome notes** – pleasant music
- **Shady haunt** – cool, resting place
- **Weary band** – tired group of caravan
- **Theme** – subject matter
- **Maiden** – young unmarried girl
- **Mounted** – climbed
- **Bore** – carried

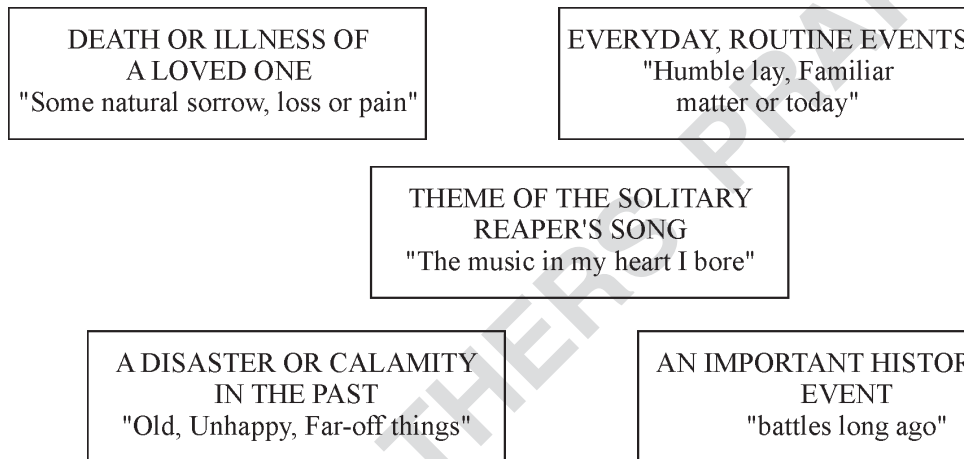
SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS (SOLVED)

1. The poet could not understand the words of the song, yet he raised several possibilities about its theme. In the diagram below are some of these possibilities. Read the third stanza again, and find the phrase that matches each. Copy and complete the diagram, writing each phrase in the empty boxes. Work in pairs.



Ans :



2. On the basis of your understanding of the poem, answer the following questions by ticking the correct choice.

(a) The central idea of the poem 'The Solitary Reaper' is _____.

- (i) well sung songs give us happiness
- (ii) melodious sounds appeal to all
- (iii) beautiful experiences give us lifelong pleasure
- (iv) reapers can sing like birds

Ans : (a) (iii) beautiful experiences give us lifelong pleasure

(b) In the poem 'The Solitary Reaper' to whom does the poet say 'Stop here or gently pass?'

- (i) to the people cutting corn
- (ii) to himself
- (iii) to the people who make noise
- (iv) to all the passersby

Ans : (b) (iv) to all the passersby

(c) 'The Solitary Reaper' is a narrative poem set to music. This form of verse is called a _____.

- (i) lyric
- (ii) soliloquy
- (iii) monologue
- (iv) sonnet

Ans : (c) (i) lyric

(d) The poet's lament in the poem 'The Solitary Reaper' is that _____.

- (i) he cannot understand the song
- (ii) he did not know the lass
- (iii) she stopped singing at once
- (iv) he had to move away

Ans : (d) (iv) he had to move away

(e) The setting of the poem is _____.

- (i) Arabia
- (ii) Hebrides
- (iii) Scotland
- (iv) England

Ans : (e) (iii) Scotland

3. Read the second stanza again, in which Wordsworth compares the solitary reaper's song with the song of the nightingale and the cuckoo. On the basis of your reading (and your imagination), copy and complete the table below. (Work in groups of four, then have a brief class discussion).

	Place	Heard by	Impact on listener
Solitary Reaper	Scottish Highlands	the poet	holds him spellbound
Nightingale			
Cuckoo			

Ans :

	Place	Heard by	Impact on listener
Solitary Reaper	Scottish Highlands	The poet	holds him spellbound
Nightingale	Arabian Sands	travellers	reduces the tiredness of travellers
Cuckoo	Hebrides	people or passers-by	has far-reaching effect, heralds the coming of spring, end of winter

4. Why do you think Wordsworth has chosen the song of the nightingale and the cuckoo, for comparison with the solitary reaper's song ?

Ans. : The nightingale and the cuckoo are known as song-birds. Many poets have written about their melodious

notes and there is a reference to nightingale even in the Bible. So the poet has chosen their songs for comparison with the Solitary Reaper's song.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Read the following extracts and choose the correct option :

1. *Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain ;
O listen! for the vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.*

(a) Identify 'she' from the above stanza.

- (i) A traveller (iii) Solitary reaper
(ii) The poet (iv) None of the above

(b) How does the poet know that the song is melancholy when he cannot understand the words?

- (i) From the girl's expression
(ii) From the words of the song
(iii) From the tune
(iv) From her dress

(c) What effect does the girl's song have over the surroundings?

- (i) Has no effect
(ii) All people desert the valley
(iii) The valley echoes with the song
(iv) The valley is indifferent

Ans : (a) (iii) (b) (iii) (c) (iii)

2. *A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the cuckoo bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.*

(a) What is cuckoo bird famous for?

- (i) Cheerfulness (ii) Thrill

(iii) Driving away tiredness

(iv) Welcoming the spring

(b) How does the Solitary Reaper's song score over the song of the cuckoo?

- (i) It is more far-reaching
(ii) It echoes more
(iii) It is more musical and fresh
(iv) It does not have any effect

(c) Hebrides means :

- (i) a group of trees (ii) far off valleys
(iii) sea (iv) a group of islands off near Scotland

Ans : (a) (iv) (b) (i) (c) (iv)

3. *Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far off things,
And battles long ago.*

(a) Explain the use of 'perhaps' in the second line.

- (i) The poet is not sure
(ii) He is double-minded
(iii) He is indifferent
(iv) None of these

(b) 'Flow', – what quality of the solitary reaper song is expressed here?

- (i) Its fluidity (ii) Its evocativeness
(iii) Its spontaneity (iv) Its music

- (c) *What is the poet's guess?*
 (i) The theme is of spring
 (ii) Of happiness and forgotten things
 (iii) Of battles and sad events in the past
 (iv) Of stories

Ans : (a) (i) (b) (iii) (c) (iii)

4. *Or is it some more humble lay,
 Familiar matter of today?
 Some natural sorrow, loss or pain,
 That has been, may be again.*

- (a) **'It' in the first line refers to**
 (i) the valley (ii) the song
 (iii) the solitary reaper (iv) her dress

- (b) **Explain 'humble lay'.**
 (i) A song about ordinary events
 (ii) A song about extraordinary things
 (iii) A song about modest things
 (iv) A song about rich people

(c) **What does the poet wish to convey by saying 'that has been and may be again'?**

- (i) A natural loss, and pain
 (ii) A natural event
 (iii) Natural sorrow which can occur again
 (iv) Both (i) and (iii)

Ans : (a) (ii) (b) (i) (c) (iii)

5. *Whatever the theme, the maiden sang
 As if her song could have no ending;
 I saw her singing at her work
 And o'er the sickle bending*

(a) *What other activities is the maiden doing besides singing?*

- (i) She is ploughing (ii) binding the corn
 (iii) cutting grass (iv) none of the above

- (b) *What makes the maiden's song extraordinary?*
 (i) Its musicality (ii) Its eternal nature
 (iii) Its theme (iv) Her voice

(c) *What effect does the song have over the poet?*

- (i) Mesmerising (ii) Impressive
 (iii) Invigorating (iv) No effect

Ans : (a) (ii) (b) (ii) (c) (i)

6. *I listen'd, motionless and still
 And, as I mounted up the hill,
 The music in my heart I bore,
 Long after it was heard no more.*

- (a) *Where does the poet go?*
 (i) Down the valleys
 (ii) Doesn't go anywhere

- (iii) Climbed up the mountain
 (iv) Nowhere

(b) *How did the song affect the poet?*

- (i) It impressed him
 (ii) Served as an inspiration
 (iii) Left a permanent mark on his heart
 (iv) Had no effect

(c) *What does the poet want to convey by "long after it was heard no more"?*

- (i) Music is entertaining
 (ii) Music is eternal and can give pleasure even when you do not hear it
 (iii) Sad music is always remembered
 (iv) The universal and permanent impression of music.

Ans : (a) (iii) (b) (iii) (c) (iv)

7. *Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
 And sings a melancholy strain ;
 O listen! for the vale profound
 Is overflowing with the sound.*

[CBSE 2010 (Term I)]

(a) *'melancholy strain' in the second line refers to :*

- (i) Sad song (iii) Happy song
 (ii) Thrilling song (iv) Sweet song

(b) *Identify the figure of speech in the above lines :*

- (i) Personification (ii) Metaphor
 (iii) Imagery (iv) Alliteration

(c) *The last two lines mean :*

- (i) Her voice is resounding in the valley
 (ii) She is singing at a high pitch
 (iii) Her voice is reaching outside the valley
 (iv) She is asking everyone to listen to her

Ans. (a) (i) (b) (iii) (c) (i)

8. *No nightingale did ever chant*

*More welcome notes to weary bands
 Of Travellers in some shady haunt
 Among Arabian Sands*

*A voice so thrilling ne'ver was heard
 In spring – time from the cuckoo – bird
 Breaking the silence of the seas
 Among the farthest Hebrides*

[CBSE 2010 (Term I)]

(a) *According to the poet, nightingales sing :*

- (i) to welcome the travellers
 (ii) to please themselves
 (iii) to welcome the tired travellers
 (iv) to get relief from their own pains

- (b) *The nightingales sing :*
 (i) in spring season in desert of Arabia
 (ii) in autumn season in deserts
 (iii) in spring season in deserts of Thar
 (iv) in spring season in deserts of Egypt

- (c) *The effect of the voice of the cuckoo bird is :*
 (i) that it refreshes the tired travellers
 (ii) that it is spread everywhere
 (iii) that it seems to welcome travellers
 (iv) breaks the seas' silence

Ans. (a) (iii) (b) (i) (c) (iv)

NON-MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Read the following extracts and answer the questions given below :

1. *Will none tell me what she sings?
 Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
 For old, unhappy, far off things,
 And battles long ago.*

(a) Explain the use of 'perhaps' in the second line.

Ans. 'Perhaps' is used to show that poet is not sure about the theme of solitary reaper's song.

(b) 'Flow', – what quality of the solitary reaper song is expressed here?

Ans. The word 'flow' expresses the spontaneity of solitary reaper's song.

(c) What is the poet's guess?

Ans. He guesses that she might be singing about some unhappy things of the past or the battles fought long ago.

2. *Or is it some more humble lay,
 Familiar matter of today?
 Some natural sorrow, loss or pain,
 That has been, may be again.*

(a) 'It' in the first line refers to :

Ans. 'It' in the first line refers to solitary reaper's song.

(b) Explain 'humble lay'.

Ans. It means that solitary reaper's song may be about some ordinary people.

(c) What does the poet wish to convey by saying 'that has been and may be again' ?

Ans. He wishes to convey that the song may be about some natural sorrow which can occur again.

3. *Whatever the theme, the maiden sang
 As if her song could have no ending;
 I saw her singing at her work
 And o'er the sickle bending*

(a) What other activities is the maiden doing besides singing ?

Ans. Besides singing, the maiden is cutting and binding the grain.

(b) What makes the maiden's song extraordinary?

Ans. Maiden's voice makes her song extraordinary.

(c) What effect does the song have over the poet ?

Ans. The song left an indelible mark on the poet's heart.

4. *I listen'd, motionless and still
 And, as I mounted up the hill,
 The music in my heart I bore,
 Long after it was heard no more.*

(a) Where does the poet go?

Ans. The poet is climbing up the mountain.

(b) How did the song affect the poet?

Ans. The song left a permanent mark on the poet's heart.

(c) What does the poet want to convey by "long after it was heard no more"?

Ans. The poet wants to say that the music is eternal and can give pleasure even when you do not hear it.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the significance of the title of the poem.

Ans. The poem's title and theme are based on the fact that once in the course of his walking tours of Scotland William Wordsworth, the poet, and his sister came across a solitary reaper, a young highland lass, who was reaping and binding corn as it was the harvest time. As she was

working peacefully all by herself, she was singing. Her song had a touch of sadness. The memory of this lone girl and the melancholy notes of her song remained with the poet for all time. Wordsworth's poem "The Solitary Reaper" somehow immortalises her.

2. 'Solitary Reaper' is a poem that depicts a simple peasant girl gifted with an extraordinary voice. What qualities make the girl unforgettable?

Ans. The melodious voice of the Solitary Reaper is unforgettable. It has tender melancholic strains, the sweetest human voice ever heard that haunted the poet for all time. He could not understand the dialect, nor the theme of her song. Her musical notes ran like water and surpassed the beauty of the songs of the nightingale and the cuckoo. The intensity and the enchanting quality of her song left an everlasting impression on the poet mind.

3. Give two examples of hyperbole and alliteration from the poem.

Ans. 'Silence of the seas,' and 'sings a melancholy strain' 'perhaps the plaintive numbers flow,' these poetic repetition of the 'S' sound and 'P' sound is a device used by poets called alliteration. Hyperbole is also a poetic device in which something written or described is made to sound more exciting, better or dangerous. "O' listen! for the vale profound is overflowing with the sound". The sound of the reaper's song is so powerful that it fills the deep valleys, it is an exaggeration.

4. Why is the song of the solitary reaper compared to the nightingale's song?

Ans. The nightingale is acclaimed as a song bird endowed with a sweet voice who is supposed to sing in a melodious and soothing way. The solitary reaper's voice is also sweet and melodious. Her song is so sweetly melancholy that it leaves an indelible mark in the poet's mind. Shady haunt is a cool resting place in an oasis in the Arabian desert where weary travellers are resting.

5. What arrested the attention of the poet out for

a walk in the countryside ? [CBSE 2010 (Term I)]

Ans. While walking in the countryside, the poet heard the solitary reaper's song. He was struck by the fact that the girl was cutting the harvest alone and on a happy occasion singing a melancholy song. It was so melodious that it once caught poet's attention. He finds her song sweeter than a nightingale and more thrilling than a cuckoo bird.

6. How could the poet hear the song of the Solitary Reaper, when it could be heard no more?

[CBSE 2010 (Term I)]

Ans. One day, while climbing up a hill, the poet hears solitary reaper's song. The song reminds him of a nightingale and a cuckoo. He finds the song so enchanting that it leaves an indelible mark on the poet's mind and he believes that the memory of the song will remain with him forever. This also shows that music has a universal appeal.

7. How do we know that the highland girl was engrossed in her work? [CBSE 2010 (Term I)]

Ans. Once the poet comes across a highland girl while climbing up a hill. The young girl was reaping and binding the corn as it was the harvest time. As she was working peacefully all by herself, she was singing. The whole valley resounds with her melodious voice but she is ignorant of all this and is totally engrossed in her work.

8. What guesses does the poet make about the theme of the Solitary Reaper's song?

[CBSE 2010 (Term I)]

Ans. The solitary reaper was singing the song in a dialect. The poet was unable to comprehend its meaning but was able to gauge from its sad note that it probably relates to some unhappy memories, some battles fought long ago. The poet also guesses that the song may be about the commonplace things like joys and sorrows.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the effect of the Solitary Reaper's song on the listeners. Why is it compared to the nightingale and the cuckoo?

Ans. The poet describes the solitary reaper's song, filling the deep valleys, sweeter than the voice of a nightingale. It is more welcome than a nightingale's chant heard by weary travellers in the shady haunts of the Arabian desert. It is more thrilling than a cuckoo bird's song which in spring time can break the silence of the seas. It made the poet stand motionless and still to listen and carry it with him in his heart as he mounted up the hill never to forget it evermore. References to the Arabian sands and Scotlands Hebrides (far-off Islands) impart an exotic feeling.

2. Discuss the scenic beauty of the background. How does it highlight the musicality of the song of the

solitary reaper?

Ans. The scenic beauty is captured and displayed by the poet in vale profound, overflowing with the sound (the solitary reaper's song), "Weary bands of travellers in some shady haunts among the Arabian sands". Breaking the silence of the seas among the farthest hebrides.

3. What impresses the poet? Why?

Ans. William Wordsworth describes and exemplifies a once 'in a lifetime kind of memory' that is meant to be taken out of the storehouse of memory and enjoyed forever. The poet is struck by the beauty and the melody of the mountain girl, working in harmony with her surroundings. The maiden's song enchants the poet and the melancholy strain makes him wonder at the content of the song. The melody and enchanting quality of her song reminds him of

the nightingale and the cuckoo but the intensity of her song overflows and reverberates throughout the valley. Whether she was singing about a battle or common sorrows or illness of a loved one, the poet has no idea.

The solitary reaper's song leaves a lasting impression on the poet's mind and he believes that the memory of this song will be with him forever.

4. What message does the poet wish to convey in the poem?

Ans. What impresses the poet in the song is not its content but its emotionally expressive music. This feeling could have no ending and it communicates wordlessly something universal about human condition. Despite the 'melancholy strain', the poet proceeds on his way, his 'heart' carrying her music. For that reason the poem relates to an 'ecstatic moment' in which a passer-by transcends the limitations of mortality. Both the song and the poet can go on together. It also expresses the thought that the appeal and music is universal, language is not important.

5. Wordsworth had a wonderful experience listening to the highland girl while out for a walk in the countryside. He comes home and pens down his feelings in his diary immediately. Write his diary.

[CBSE 2010 (Term I)]

Dear Diary,

Today, after a long time, I heard a song more melodious than a nightingale and a cuckoo bird. I am so thrilled that I want to pour my feelings into you. The highland lass who I heard singing while climbing the hill was so engrossed in her work of reaping the crop that she was totally oblivious of her surroundings. Although I could not understand the dialect she was singing in but from the melancholy notes of her song I was able to gauge that it related to some unhappy memories, or some battles fought long ago. I was so mesmerised and spellbound that I was held motionless and still. But the memory of her song will always remain fresh for me. It has left an indelible mark on my mind. Oh God! it is still resounding in my ears.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

(A) READING/WRITING

Music has eternal craze for most of us. From *sufi* to hip-hop, from techno to ballad, from R & B to *bhangra*, the entire generation is obsessed with music. Write an article on the topic 'The Amazing Power of Music.'

Read it aloud in the class.

(B) CONVERSATION SKILLS

Recall an experience that left a permanent mark on your memory. Share with your neighbour how that experience brought a solid change in personality.

Share with others in the class.

(C) CLASS DISCUSSION

Have a discussion in the class on the topic 'Music can be enjoyed without understanding the lyrics'. Agree/Disagree
Share the outcome with others.