

Virtue

George Herbert

A. Lead – in:

Many things that fill our hearts with joy are short-lived. Flowers wither, seasons change, night follows day. Only virtue has eternal value and never perishes.

B. Let's listen to the poem:

1. Don't open your books. Listen to your teacher as she/he reads it aloud with proper intonation.
2. Your teacher will read it aloud for the second time. This time you open the text and follow him/her line by line to mark the manner of reading. Thereafter read the poem silently to understand it.

C. The Text:

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright
The bridal of the earth and sky;
The dew shall weep thy fall to-night;
For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue angry and brave
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye;
Thy root is ever in its grave
And thou must die.

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie,
My music shows ye have your closes,
And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
Like season'd timber, never gives;
But though the whole world turn to coal,
Then chiefly lives.

D. About the poet:

During the seventeenth century, a number of poets in England wrote dramatic and argumentative poems. They wrote both love poems and religious poems which blended emotion with intellect. Notable among them were John Donne, George Herbert and Andrew Marvell. A clergyman and a great orator, **George Herbert** (1593 – 1633) was essentially a religious poet. “Virtue”, “The Collar” and “The Pulley” are a few of his well-known poems.

E. About the poem:

The poem “Virtue” appeared in a collection of verse titled **The Temple** (1633). It depicts the worth of a true and noble soul. Mere beauty is not enough ; it should be combined with virtue in order to endure. Earthly beauty represented by ‘sweet day’, ‘sweet rose’ and ‘sweet spring’ is short-lived, but a ‘sweet and virtuous soul’ lives for ever.

F. Notes and glossary:

bridal	:	pertaining to a wedding
dew	:	moisture deposited from the air on cooling, especially at night in the form of small drops upon the surface of objects.
weep	:	cry, moan, lament
hue	:	colour
bids	:	invite / commands
rash	:	tending to act in haste and without due consideration
gazer	:	one who looks steadily and intently
compacted:		compressed / condensed
seasoned :		(of wood) made suitable for use as timber by adjusting its moisture content.
timber :		wood (growing or cut) suitable for building or carpentry
gives :		to yield to pressure / to collapse / to break down

G. Let's understand the poem:

1. How is the sweetness of the day described ?
2. Whose wedding is referred to in the first stanza?
3. Who laments in the first stanza and whose death is mourned there?
4. How does the poet describe the rose?
5. What does the spring comprise?
6. What are the adjectives used to describe the soul?
7. Who is the soul compared to?
8. What is the distinguishing quality of the soul?

H. Let's appreciate the poem:

1. What are the images of Nature that the poet uses in the first stanza?
2. Who is personified in the first stanza ?
3. Why is the colour of the rose described as 'angry' and 'brave' ?
4. Where does the root of the rose lie ?
5. Do you find any far-fetched comparison in the third stanza? What is it ?
6. What does the poet mean by 'music' in the third stanza?
7. How is the immortality of the soul established?
8. What are the objects of physical beauty that are described in the poem?
9. How is a sweet and virtuous soul described ?

I. Let's speak :

- (a) The word 'sky' rhymes with the word 'die' in the first stanza of the poem. Work in groups of three or four and say the other rhyming words used in the poem.
- (b) Read the poem once more. Work in groups. Select a leader or chairperson for each group. The person in the chair must keep order. Each group will say whether the following statements are **True** or **False** in relation to the poem. Co-operate with each other and discuss the different viewpoints. Then note down the useful points.
 - (1) Sorrowful days are cool, calm and bright.
 - (2) The sweet rose is bold and bright in colour.
 - (3) Sweet day marks the wedding of the earth with the sky.
 - (4) Sweet spring is full of sweet roses.
 - (5) Sweet spring is compared to a basket full of flowers.
 - (6) The root of the sweet rose does not die.
 - (7) A virtuous soul lives for ever.

J. Let's write :

- (a) 1. What is the central theme of the poem ?
2. How does the poet describe spring ?
3. How does the poet describe a virtuous soul?
- (b) Let's try writing a poem beginning '**I wish.....**' Work in groups of three or four.

In your group-

- Think of some ideas
- Make a list of wishes. Let your list be long.
- Write down what comes to your mind :
For example :
 - I wish I had wings.
 - I wish I were the Prime Minister.
 - I wish I had a house full of chocolates.
- Choose one wish from your list. Discuss why you have such a wish. Jot down the points.
- Then arrange your ideas into lines and finally you will be able to write a poem.

Here is one for you :

I wish I had a house full of books,
I would read and read
And go on and on
Till I fall asleep.
I would read and read,
Of people and places
Of yesterday, and today
And imagine landscapes and faces.

