

Appreciation of English Literary Texts

Grade 10 & 11

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The Garden of Love

by
William Blake

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William Blake (1757 –1827)



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About the poet.

- William Blake was born on 28th November, 1757 in London, England. He is an English poet, painter and an engraver.
 - He was mainly educated at home from his mother and read a lot by himself. (self-educated person)
 - He was a Romantic poet. But Blake is considered as a social critic in the Romantic age.
- The American Revolution (1774), The French Revolution (1789) are some contemporary happenings of Blake's time.



About the poet

- He wrote two volumes of poetry called “Songs of Innocence” (1789) and “Songs of Experience” (1794). Songs of Innocence is a poetry collection written from the child’s point of view of innocent, wonderment and spontaneity in natural settings.
- Songs of Experience contains many poems in response to the songs of Innocence, suggesting ironic contrasts as the child matures and learns of such concepts as fear and envy.

About the poet

- The poem “The Garden of Love” comes under the songs of experience.
- In some poems, he criticized society and social evils caused by industrial revolution such as poverty, unemployment, child labor, unhealthy environment, restrictions imposed on people etc.
- He represented industrial England in some of his poems. The poem “London” is a good example in which he criticized the social evils in industrialized London.

About the poet

- In his later life he became more and more Christian. He was a rebel even in his religious poems.
- William Blake died at home, at the age of 70, on 12 August, 1827.



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The Garden of Love

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green:

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And “Thou shalt not” writ over the door;
So I turned to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore;

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds
And binding with briars my joys and desires.

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Glossary

- Chapel - a part of a large church/ small church
- midst - in the middle of
- green - ground with grass used for playing games
- thou shalt not - you should not enter
- writ - written

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- flowers bore - Had flowers earlier
- briars - Prickly bush (wild roses)
- graves - Holes in the ground to put coffins/dead bodies
- Tombstones - A stone standing or laid over a grave
- bind - Tie

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**I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green**



**And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And “Thou shalt not” writ over the door;
So I turned to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore;**



**And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires.**

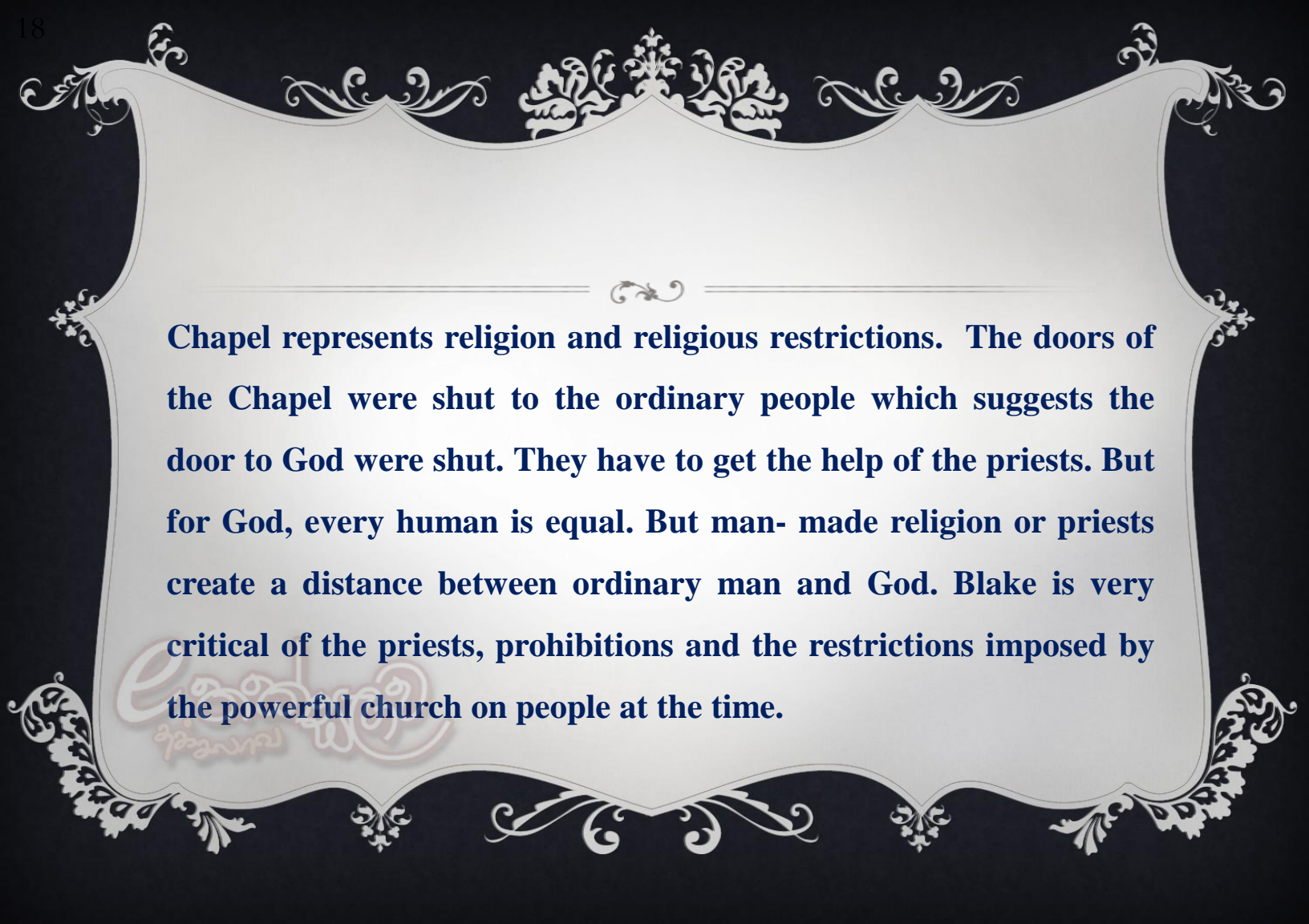
About the poem

The narrator/ the poet goes to see the garden where he used to play. But he finds a chapel has been built in the middle of the garden. Instead of sweet flowers, now the garden has been filled up with graves and tombstones. Not only that, the gates of the chapel has been shut saying "*thou shalt not*" which means "you are not allowed to enter" . The poet sees the priests in black gowns are walking. He says his joys and desires are suppressed.

A guide to a critical thinking.....

Students can critically look at the poem in several ways.

In one way, the poet talks about the suppression of human beings through religion. And there is a hint about the destruction of natural beauty, purity and freshness by human beings. Blake criticizes once a beautiful garden now turns into an unpleasant graveyard. A chapel also in the middle. The Garden of Love represent joy, happiness, freedom. In Blake's poems "Green" is associated with childhood. So the Garden of Love represent innocence too.



Chapel represents religion and religious restrictions. The doors of the Chapel were shut to the ordinary people which suggests the door to God were shut. They have to get the help of the priests. But for God, every human is equal. But man-made religion or priests create a distance between ordinary man and God. Blake is very critical of the priests, prohibitions and the restrictions imposed by the powerful church on people at the time.

Literary Techniques

- **Narration** – **First person narration**
- **Juxtaposition** – **garden in the past and now**
- **Images** – **visual imagery of a garden full of sweet flowers and a graveyard full of tombstones.**
- **Symbolic language**

- Alliteration – *binding with briars /turned to the*
- Versification – 3 stanza poem which contains quatrains (4 lines)
- Capitalization of Garden, Love and Chapel – these words give more than one meaning and deeper meanings.

Symbols

- Garden of Love - Biblical allusion - The garden of Eden symbolizes beauty / happiness
- Chapel - Symbolizes institutionalized religion
- Thou shalt not - Can be referred to the 10 commandments which also begins with “Thou shalt not”. Here it symbolizes prohibition, restrictions.

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- Graves/Tombstones - symbolizes unpleasantness /death/unhappiness
- Flowers - symbolizes beauty, joy, life
- briars - barriers / pain
- black - sadness/ unpleasantness
- priests in black gowns - fear/ threat

Some other poems of Blake.....

London

- 1) I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

- 2.) In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

3. How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every black'ning Church appalls,
And hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down palace

4. But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER

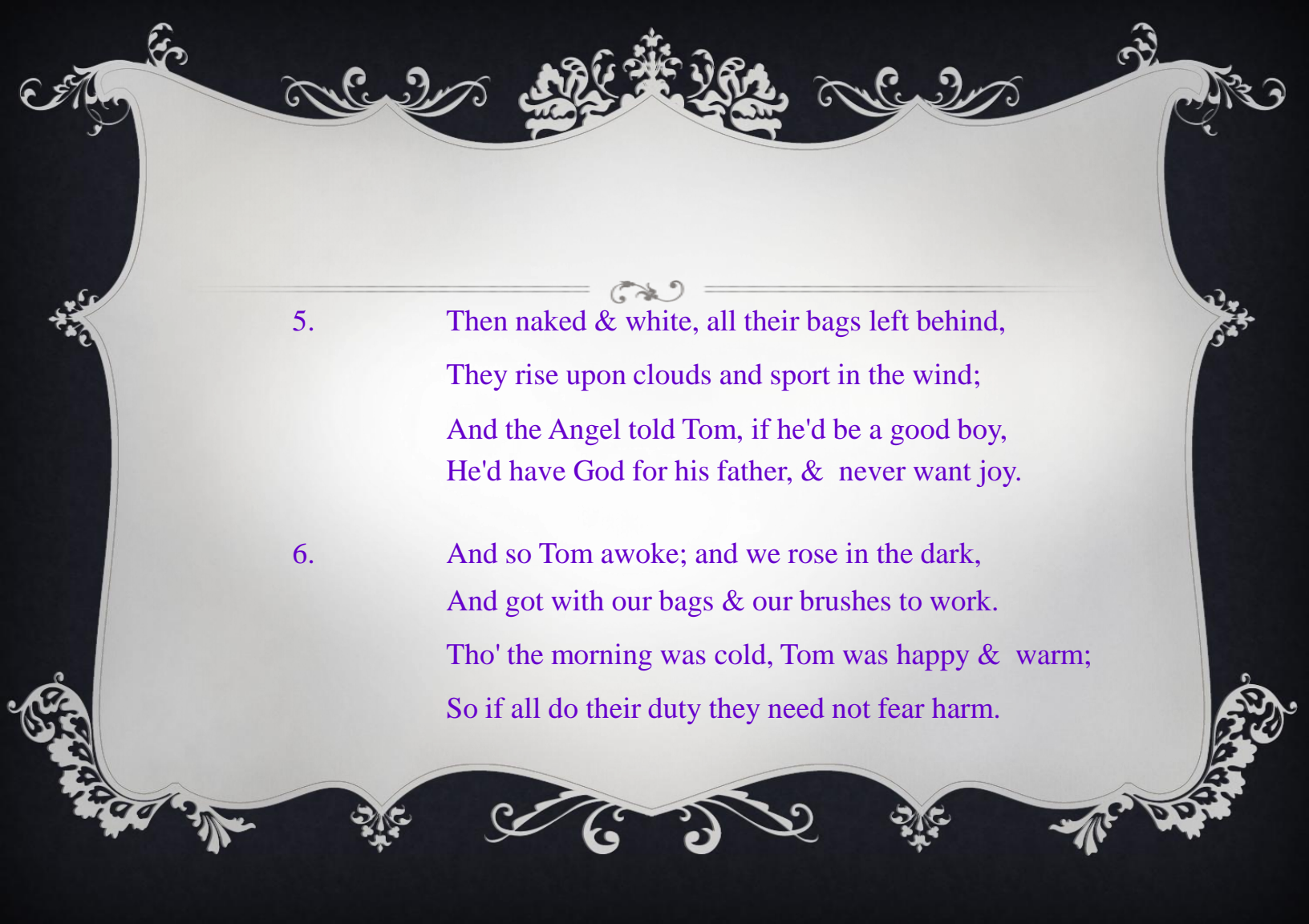
1. When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry " 'weep ! 'weep ! 'weep ! 'weep ! "
So your chimneys I sweep, & in soot I sleep.

2. There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd: so I said
"Hush, Tom ! never mind it, for when your head's bare
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.



The chimney sweeper contd.....

3. “And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight ! ---
That thousand of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,
Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black.
4. And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open'd the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the Sun.



5. Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father, & never want joy.

6. And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.

Some other poems of Blake.....

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| 1. The Sick Rose | (Songs of Experience) |
| 2. Holy Thursday | (Songs of Experience) |
| 3. Holy Thursday | (Songs of Innocence) |
| 4. Infant Joy | (Songs of Innocence) |
| 5. Infant Sorrow | (Songs of Experience) |
| 6. Tiger | (Songs of Experience) |
| 7. Lamb | (Songs of Innocence) |

Reference

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blake

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<http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/blake/>

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