Unit 5

Title: “On the Grasshopper and the Cricket” by John Keats[[1]](#footnote-1)

Suggested Time: 3-4 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.8.1, RL.8.2, RL.8.4, RL.8.10; W.8.2, W.8.4, W.8.9; SL.8.1; L.8.1, L.8.2, L.8.5

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

Nature is eternal.

Synopsis

“The sonnet begins with the speaker stating that the earth’s poetry never dies. In summer, the grasshopper runs among the hedgerows singing his song and then rests in the shade. In the frosty silence of winter, the earth’s poetry continues—now the cricket, singing from the stove, shrills a song that’s as warm and summery as the grasshopper’s music” (p. 442).

1. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire selection independently.
2. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. Depending on the text length and student need, the teacher may choose to read the full text or a passage aloud. For a particularly complex text, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| In the first eight lines of the poem, what season is described? How is it described? For what purpose? | Summer is described with the following images: “birds are faint with the hot sun/and hid in cooling trees” and the grasshopper “takes the lead in summer luxury.” Even in the heat of summer, when every other creature is resting, the grasshopper expresses the earth’s poetry. |
| How do the grasshopper’s actions differ from the birds’? What is the purpose of this comparison? | He is actively from “hedge to hedge” while the birds are “faint” and “hide” in cooling trees. Nature is ever alive at every stage; while the birds are resting, the grasshopper is active. |
| What noun does the pronoun “that” refer to? What noun is that contrasted with in the last four lines of the poem? | “That” refers to the grasshopper’s voice. It is contrasted with the cricket’s song at the end of the poem. |
| When Keats states that the Grasshopper “takes the lead/In summer luxury. He has never done with his delights,” to what luxury and delights does he refer? | The grasshopper is eating the grass as well jumping from place to place for his pleasure, before he tires out and rests. |
| Keats says “He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.” What is this saying about the grasshopper? How does this connect with the poem’s theme? | The grasshopper rests “at ease” which can be interpreted as the end of his lifespan so that when he dies, while the cricket takes his spot. Another interpretation could be that the grasshopper is now simply resting, as the birds were in the first three lines. Both interpretations lead to the fact that another creature takes the spot, filling the void left by the other, in the never ending cycle of nature. |
| In this Italian sonnet, who creates “the poetry of the earth” in the first eight lines? In the last six lines? How do they create “poetry”? | The grasshopper is the poet of summer; the cricket is the poet of winter. Their vibrant, different voices, like a poet’s, are heard through their sound and actions, conveying the deeper meaning of the resiliency of nature. |
| Why does Keats capitalize the nouns “Grasshopper” and “Cricket”? Why are no other nouns capitalized? What is the relationship between the Grasshopper and the Cricket? | Keats personifies the Grasshopper and the Cricket. Capitalizing these nouns indicates the importance of the environment and nature in the poem. The Grasshopper and Cricket are the speakers reflecting the sounds of the earth. The two songs complement each other even to the end when one takes over from the other. |
| In the last six lines of the poem, what season does Keats describe? How is it described? What comment does it make on the first part of the sonnet? | Keats describes winter using words like “lone,” “frost,” and “silence.” He tells us that in winter the earth’s poetry is expressed in the song of the cricket, as it was in the song of the grasshopper in summer. |
| What simple words does Keats use to describe a summer day? What words does he use to describe his winter evening? How does the use of simple words convey Keats’s meaning? | Summer—faint, hot sun, cooling trees  Winter—frost, warmth, drowsiness  These simple words show that the relationships in nature are more simple and less complex than we might think. |
| Describe the tone of the first 8 lines of the poem? Cite evidence from the text to support your description. How do the “silence” of the frost and the “shrills” of the cricket in line 10 affect the tone of the poem? | The tone of the first 8 lines is vibrant and warm. The birds hide in “cooling trees.” The grasshopper’s voice runs “from hedge to hedge,” and “he takes the lead in summer luxury.” After he is done with his tasks, “he rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.” In contrast, the cricket’s shrills in line 10 create a harsher tone. The onomatopoeia-like shrills from the cricket are startling as they pierce the silent frost. Although the silence of the frost may represent the death or hibernation of most creatures, nature is still very much alive and vibrant in the piercing song of the cricket. |
| What lines echo the first line later in the poem? How do the changed words affect the meaning? What do the verb tenses signify? | The first line “The poetry of earth is never dead” is echoed in line 6 “he has never done,” line 9 “the poetry of earth is ceasing never,” and in line 11 “the Cricket’s song, in warmth increasing ever.” The changed words emphasize the focus of the sonnet: the ongoing cycle of nature, from summer to winter and around again for all eternity. The verbs, while all in the present, change from a simple present verb to the present progressive and finally to the present participle, all indicating that life, while happening in the present, is ever moving forward and changing. |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | hedge  mown  luxury  ceasing  shrills |  |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | mead  wrought |  |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt

*Keats writes, “the poetry of the earth is never dead.” How do the literary devices and word choices in this poem reflect the truth that “the poetry of the earth is ceasing never”? Write an informative/explanatory essay to examine this topic and support your ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.*

* Teacher Instructions

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
2. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should guide students in gathering and using any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions earlier. Some students will need a good deal of help gathering this evidence, especially when this process is new and/or the text is challenging!
3. Students who need further assistance in focusing on comparisons may want to consider such concepts as nature, sound/silence, heat/cold, summer/winter.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| poetry of earth is never dead | *Thesis*  This is the theme of Keats’ poem, which is supported throughout with the imagery. While one creature rests, the other is active. |
| birds are faint with the hot sun | *Nature=birds, sun Heat=hot sun*  Here Keats shows that the birds are resting under the hot sun; however, at the same time, the grasshopper is actively moving. The birds also demonstrate that the world is comprised of many living creatures, not just the grasshopper and cricket. Each, in turn, take an active part in the cycle of nature.. |
| a voice will run | *Sound=voice*  The voice is the grasshopper’s, which is personified to represent the constant forward movement of nature. The voice goes on and on, like the seasons. |
| hide in cooling trees | *Nature=trees Heat=cooling*  The cooling trees contrast with the images of the hot sun. This also represents the dynamics nature or how nature can be many things at once. |
| hedge to hedge | *Nature=hedge*  As the grasshopper moves from hedge to hedge, nature is constantly moving forward, never going back. |
| new-mown mead | *Nature=mead, Sound=new-mown*  The mead has been freshly cut by the insistent activity of the grasshopper. The grasshopper will work tirelessly until he rests and another element of nature takes over. |
| In summer luxury | *Season=summer, Luxury=Heat*  This luxury is the prime of the grasshopper’s life, when he lives most vibrantly and is actively participating in the life cycle of nature. |
| he has never done/With his delights; | *Action: never done with his delights* (reflect thesis)  This reflects the thesis again before the shift occurs. The delights signify that his constant activities are where he finds his happiness. |
| tired out with fun | *Heat=tired out Season=rest*  Now he is transitioning from the hard work, although fun, to the rest that he needs. Although the grasshopper may rest now, nature will continue to go on as another season and the cricket takes the grasshopper’s place. |
| rest at ease | *Season=rest at ease*  Knowing that he had worked hard and found it pleasurable, he was able to rest knowing that his life was worthwhile. Just as man can rest after a productive life, the grasshopper can rest on his accomplishments because his work is done. |
| beneath some pleasant weed | *Nature=weed Sound=pleasant*  This reiterates the image of “rest of ease” as discussed above. Weeds are not normally seen as a pleasant image, but here the weed brings pleasant shade to the resting grasshopper. |
| poetry of earth is ceasing never | *Thesis restated, with emphasis on “ceasing” rather than “*never”  It restates the theme of line 1, however, the use of the word ceasing represents the action of nature, never really finishing. Though the creature’s life will end, the earth and nature never completely wind down. |
| lone winter evening | *Season=winter Nature=evening Sound=lone*  Though much of the summer life is gone, there are still other creatures that thrive in the harsh conditions of winter where nature still manages to survive. This contrasts to the action of the earlier 8 lines. |
| when the frost/Has wrought silence | *Season=frost Sound=silence*  This is similar to the last section, when winter shows its harshness and the silence represents the death of many creatures. The silence of the frost also contrasts with the poets of nature. The grasshopper and cricket are both dynamic, vibrant voices as opposed to the silence of the frost. |
| from the stove there shrills | *Heat=stove Sound=shrills*  The harsh shrills cry out from the stove, showing the harshness of nature, However, it also represents the vibrancy of nature, how it is screaming out it is alive. The shrill voice of the cricket reflects the harsh environment in which it thrives. |
| Cricket’s song, in warmth increasing ever | *Sound=song, Heat=warmth*  The song reflects the earlier song of the grasshopper. Though the season is extremely cold, the warmth represents the life of the cricket, suggesting the inevitable end of winter and a return to the warmth of summer and the song of the grasshopper as described in the first eight lines. |
| And seems to one in drowsiness half lost | *Heat=drowsiness*  As the sleeper doesn’t hear the cricket’s song, so people are not really aware of the dynamic aspects of nature. We do not stop to reflect upon nature and its power. |
| Grasshopper’s among some grassy hills | *Nature=grassy hills*  The closing line of the poem brings the two poets together by acknowledging the relationship of these two songs. This line refers to the grasshopper’s song, which overlaps the song of the cricket, signifying that life is continuously moving. One who is not attuned to nature may miss the intricacies of nature and its creatures. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students complete final draft.

* Sample Answer

Who said “life has to end”? It surely wasn’t John Keats. In his poem, “On the Grasshopper and the Cricket,” Keats uses two insignificant creatures to represent the life cycle of the earth. The actions and voices of the grasshopper and cricket throughout the poem create an atmosphere that unveils nature’s vibrancy and life’s never ceasing movement.

Keats deliberately expresses the theme of the poem in line one where he makes the argument that “The poetry of earth is never dead”. He uses both metaphor and personification to express to the reader the life or poetry of the earth. The earth’s poetry is a metaphor for the sounds and activities of all of earth’s creatures, and by expressing the thought that poetry never dies, Keats personifies earth with its never-ceasing existence. Keats supports his claim by introducing the reader to what most people would consider an insignificant creature, a grasshopper. Keats, though, personifies the grasshopper and uses its voice and daily activities to represent all of nature. The Grasshopper’s “voice,” he says, “will run from hedge to hedge,” signifying the constant forward movement of nature. Additionally, the “new moan-mead,” which is the work of the grasshopper, shows the tireless activity and efficiency with which the grasshopper works. Although the grasshopper is busy at work during the hot summer day, other creatures pause to rest like the birds who are “faint with the hot sun”. This represents the natural cycle of life; while “other creatures swoon,” the grasshopper indulges in “summer luxury”. Imagine a king feasting on his most cherished delicacies; this is the how the grasshopper feels while engaged in his work, and at this moment, he is king of the summer day. In fact, when Keats writes that the grasshopper is “never done with his delights”, he suggests that the business of the grasshopper’s activities is where he finds his happiness. These lines also support the opening statement that “earth’s poetry is never dead.”

In line seven, however, Keats transitions from the incessant work of the grasshopper, to a grasshopper “tired out with fun.” The grasshopper cannot continue forever, but as in line 8, “can rest at ease,” knowing that he has worked hard and found it pleasurable. Just as a man can rest after a productive life and feel satisfied with his work, the grasshopper can rest on his accomplishments because his work was done well. The “rest” that is described signifies the end of the grasshopper’s life, but as Keats lays the Grasshopper to rest, he reminds the reader that “the poetry of life is ceasing never” (line 9).

The first line of the poem, “The poetry of the earth is never dead” is again mirrored in line 9, “The poetry of life is ceasing never.” However, the order and tense of the words “ceasing never,” in line nine is significant as Keats uses a present participle, “ceasing,” to show that the work of the earth is continually in action and emphasizes his point by placing the adverb, never, at the end of the line. Additionally, this line serves as a transition that shows how earth’s life is not tied to individual creatures, but as one creature dies, another rises up and sings a new song that complements the former. Keats chooses to use the song of the cricket whose “shrills” cry out from the stove to take the lead during the winter season. The shrill voice of the cricket represents the vibrancy of nature, and how it is screaming out that is alive, but it also reflects the harsh environment in which it lives by contrasting with the “silence” of the frost. Keats explains that winter is “lone” and has “wrought a silence” which suggests that much of the summer life is gone. This is a contrast to the first eight lines of the poem. An exception to the cold and lonely environment is the “Cricket’s song, in warmth increasing ever” This line reflects the earlier song of the grasshopper and the fact that life within the earth still manages to survive. Keats, though, in the final two comments of the poem, describes one in a state of “drowsiness half lost” who mistakes the song of the Cricket with that of the Grasshopper’s. This is both a criticism of man’s lack of attention to the details of nature and its cycles as well as an indication that life’s never ending cycle is seamless. The sounds of earth’s creatures work harmoniously to create a never ending poetic expression.

When the circle of life is mentioned today, people may think of “The Lion King” and its message that when one life ends, another begins and the cycle repeats continually. This is the same message that Keats is expressing in the poem “On the Grasshopper and the Cricket.” Keats uses the metaphor of poetry to express the sounds and activities of nature and convey to the reader that nature is eternal. Unlike the “Lion King” however, instead of using the regal lion as his muse, and Keats uses two of the most insignificant creatures in nature to prove his point.

Additional Task

* Find something in nature that has special meaning for you. Write a poem in which you help your reader picture something in the world of nature and understand how you feel about it. You may choose to rhyme your poem and follow a regular meter, or you may choose to write in free verse, without regular rhymes or a pattern of rhythm. Perhaps you’ll try to follow the strict form of an Italian sonnet—and challenge a friend to a sonnet writing contest!

Answer: Responses will vary. Students should compose a poem that describes something that has personal significance in nature and their emotional response to it. Ensure that students use imagery or descriptive language in their responses.

Note to Teacher

The text of the poem is below:

**On the Grasshopper and the Cricket**

*John Keats*

The poetry of earth is never dead:

When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,

And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run

From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;

That is the Grasshopper’s—he takes the lead

In summer luxury—he has never done

With his delights; for when tired out with fun

He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.

The poetry of earth is ceasing never:

On a lone winter evening, when the frost

Has wrought silence, from the stove there shrills

The Cricket’s song, in warmth increasing ever,

And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,

The Grasshopper’s among some grassy hills.

Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**“On the Grasshopper and the Cricket”**

1. In the first eight lines of the poem, what season is described? How is it described? For what purpose?
2. How do the grasshopper’s actions differ from the birds’? What is the purpose of this comparison?
3. What noun does the pronoun “that” refer to? What noun is that contrasted with in the last four lines of the poem?
4. When Keats states that the Grasshopper “takes the lead/In summer luxury. He has never done with his delights,” to what luxury and delights does he refer?
5. Keats says in line 8 “He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.” What is this saying about the grasshopper? How does this connect with the poem’s theme?
6. In this Italian sonnet, who creates “the poetry of the earth” in the first eight lines? In the last six lines? How do they create “poetry”?
7. Why does Keats capitalize the nouns “Grasshopper” and “Cricket”? Why are no other nouns capitalized? What is the relationship between the Grasshopper and the Cricket?
8. In the last six lines of the poem, what season does Keats describe? How is it described? What comment does it make on the first part of the sonnet?
9. What simple words does Keats use to describe a summer day? What words does he use to describe his winter evening? How does the use of simple words convey Keats’s meaning?
10. Describe the tone of the first 8 lines of the poem? Cite evidence from the text to support your description. How do the “silence” of the frost and the “shrills” of the cricket in line 10 affect the tone of the poem?
11. What lines echo the first line later in the poem? How do the changed words affect the meaning? What do the verb tenses signify?

1. *This story is a “duplicate.” (It is found in other anthologies, as well.) This particular revision was completed by a teacher who uses a different anthology than you, so the page numbers have been removed. This may require you to make some adjustments/add page numbers to some of the questions.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)