

Topics for Discussion:

1. *Tintern Abbey* and *Frost at Midnight* were the result of a friendly competition in which each poet was to produce a work written to a common prescription. What do you think the prescription was? The poems, nonetheless, are rather different. What differences do you see that are salient for understanding each poem?
2. *Tintern Abbey* is written as a meditative argument leading to a blessing. What is a blessing? What confers the power to bless in this case? Is the course of the argument clear? Is it straightforward or does it proceed by fits and starts? Is there any characteristic use of metaphor in the poem? Locate five important metaphors and explain their importance in the poem. Does the poem rely importantly on metonyms as well?
3. Explain the function of “frost” in *Frost at Midnight*. Explain the function of silence and of the “stranger” that hovers in the grate. The poet compares himself to the “stranger”. What is the point of the comparison? What comment does it make upon the poetic imagination that informs the poem itself?
4. Comment on the phrase *But how could I forget thee?* in the sonnet *Surprised by Joy*-. Does it evince an ambiguity and if so, how does the ambiguity work? What comment does the poem seem to make upon the place of guilt in grief?
5. The second stanza of *The Solitary Reaper* might well be omitted and the result would still hold the appearance of a complete poem. What does it contribute to the poem as it stands. Reaping was normally a communal activity and a solitary reaper in a “Vale profound” was a conventional image of death. In the poem, her song is inaudible, but the poet surmises that its theme is loss and sorrow. Is the poet, then, lucky to carry the song in his heart or unfortunate?
6. A paradox haunts Wordsworth’s poetry: Many poems seem to say that Nature has blessings to confer and that we miss them by being out of touch with Nature; at the same time, others seem to say that contiguity with Nature can be deadly. How do you resolve the paradox?
7. *A Slumber Did my Spirit Seal* seems at first glance a remarkably simple poem but upon examination reveals a number of complexities. How would you account for them? The first stanza is rife with metaphor, the second arguably devoid of metaphor. How does this fact contribute to the meaning of the poem? We are all, living and dead, whirled round with rocks and trees; why does the line carry an especial poignancy?
8. Coleridge claimed that *Khubla Khan* was a fragment, a work written in haste after a vivid dream. His work was interrupted and after the interruption, he had lost all sense of the dream and its inspiration. Does the work seem like a fragment or a complete poem to you? What relationships obtain among the features of the imaginary landscape in which the “pleasure-dome” is situated? Can a “pleasure-dome” be “stately”? What effect does the Damsel with the dulcimer have upon the poet, and why should anyone be terrified by his appearance after hearing the song?