



T23

Infant Joy

The short poem you are going to read presents a simple but intense introduction to the world of innocence and joy.

William Blake
Songs of Innocence
(1789)

'I have no name:
I am **but** two days old.
What shall I call **thee**?
'I happy am,
Joy is my name.'
Sweet joy **befall** thee!

Pretty joy!
Sweet joy but two days old,
Sweet joy I call thee:
Thou **dost** smile,
I sing **the** while
Sweet joy **befall** thee.

READING COMPETENCE

1 **READ** the poem and match the highlighted words to their meaning.

- 1 may happen to
- 2 do
- 3 in the meanwhile
- 4 only
- 5 you

2 **READ** the poem again and do the following activities.

1 Answer the following questions.

- 1 Who are the two first speakers?
- 2 How old is the former?
- 3 What does the second speaker ask?
- 4 What is the reply?
- 5 What does he wish then?
- 6 What sounds improbable in this conversation?

2 Mark the rhyme scheme. Is it regular?

3 Focus on the layout of the poem and write down its features.

Number of stanzas:

Length of lines: *long / short*.

Punctuation:

4 Write down the repetitions.

5 Focus on lines 4 and 9. They contain

- A alliteration.
- B inversion.
- C onomatopoeia.

6 'happy'/'am', 'Sweet'/'thee' and 'smile'/'while' are examples of

- A assonance.
- B alliteration.
- C run-on-line.



7 What function do these devices have? Tick as appropriate.

- They give the poem a unified structure, in spite of its simplicity.
- They give a childlike quality to the language.
- They make the poem easier to remember.

8 Write down the expressions referring to the baby. What main quality is he/she given?

9 Try to explain why the baby is given no name.

- A His/Her parents have not decided his name yet.
- B He/She is an orphan.
- C He/She is still free from social conditioning.

10 What is the narrator's attitude towards the baby? Tick as appropriate.

- He is envious.
- He shares his happiness.
- He is indifferent.

11 How would you define the language of the poem?

- Complex.
- Simple.
- Ironical.
- Elevated.
- Moralising.

12 Complete the commentary with the words from the box.

innocence

life

blesses

repetition

repression

joy

calls

stanzas

society

name

draws

free



In this simple poem Blake celebrates the (1) linked to a newly born baby. He asks the baby, who is only two days old, what his/her (2) is. The baby replies it is Joy. Then the poet (3) the baby with the hope that joy will indeed characterise his/her (4)

The poem is divided into two (5) of six lines each. The (6) of 'thee' at the end of the third and sixth lines (7) the attention to the speaker and his concern with the baby.

The fact that the baby (8) itself Joy, reflects Blake's idea that man should be (9) to pursue his own state of happiness, rather than rely upon a form of happiness imposed on him by (10) This baby represents (11) that, when left alone to decide its own nature, chooses joy rather than guilt or (12)