



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,
5 Joy is my name.'
Sweet joy **befall** thee!

Pretty joy!
Sweet joy but two days old,
Sweet joy I call thee:
10 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)**