Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



Bright Star

by John Keats

Grades 9–12 · Common Core RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.5

Keats wrote the sonnet in 1819, during his love for Fanny Brawne, and later copied it into a book of Shakespeare's poems while sailing to Italy in 1820. It was published in 1838, after his death. It is a Shakespearean sonnet (ABAB CDCD EFEF GG). The first eight lines describe the star; the last six turn to the speaker's own wish.

THE POEM

Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

VOCABULARY

steadfast — firm, unchanging, loyal

splendour — brilliance, magnificence

aloft — high up

eternal — lasting forever

Eremite — a hermit, someone who lives alone for religious reasons

ablution — washing, especially as a religious ritual

moors — open, wild, hilly land

unchangeable — unable to change

swoon — faint

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What quality of the star does the speaker want to have?

2. What parts of the star's life does he NOT want? Find the words that show this.

3. What does the star watch from the sky? Name two things.

4. Where does the speaker want to be "for ever" instead?

5. What is the choice in the last line? What does it reveal about how he feels about love and time?

WRITING PROMPT

Choose something in nature you admire for one quality (a mountain's strength, a river's energy). Write a 10–14 line poem wishing you shared that quality, and explaining what you would NOT want to share.

Bright Star — Answer Key

1. Its steadiness: he wishes he were “steadfast as thou art.”
2. Its loneliness and distance: “Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,” watching like a “sleepless Eremite.”
3. “The moving waters” washing “earth’s human shores,” and “the new soft-fallen mask / Of snow upon the mountains and the moors.”
4. “Pillow’d upon my fair love’s ripening breast,” feeling her breathing, “Awake for ever in a sweet unrest.”
5. “And so live ever—or else swoon to death”: he wants this moment to last forever, or else to die in it. Love feels so intense that he cannot bear for it to change.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/bright-star-john-keats/