Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



Mandalay

by Rudyard Kipling

Grades 9–12 · Common Core RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.6, RL.9-10.5

"Mandalay" was published in 1890 and collected in Barrack-Room Ballads (1892). The speaker served in Burma, which Britain annexed in 1885. Written in a soldier's Cockney dialect with long rolling lines and a song-like refrain, it became a popular song. Readers should notice how the speaker romanticizes the East.

THE POEM

By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' lazy at the sea,
There's a Burma girl a-settin', and I know she thinks o' me;
For the wind is in the palm-trees, and the temple-bells they say:
"Come you back, you British soldier; come you back to Mandalay!"
Come you back to Mandalay,
Where the old Flotilla lay:
Can't you 'ear their paddles chunkin' from Rangoon to Mandalay?
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin'-fishes play,
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China 'crost the Bay!

'Er petticoat was yaller an' 'er little cap was green,
An' 'er name was Supi-yaw-lat—jes' the same as Theebaw's Queen,
An' I seed her first a-smokin' of a whackin' white cheroot,
An' a-wastin' Christian kisses on an 'eathen idol's foot:
Bloomin' idol made o'mud—
Wot they called the Great Gawd Budd—
Plucky lot she cared for idols when I kissed 'er where she stud!
On the road to Mandalay...

When the mist was on the rice-fields an' the sun was droppin' slow,
She'd git 'er little banjo an' she'd sing "Kulla-lo-lo!"
With 'er arm upon my shoulder an' 'er cheek agin' my cheek
We useter watch the steamers an' the hathis pilin' teak.
Elephints a-pilin' teak
In the sludgy, squdgy creek,
Where the silence 'ung that 'eavy you was 'arf afraid to speak!
On the road to Mandalay...

But that's all shove be'ind me—long ago an' fur away,
An' there ain't no 'busses runnin' from the Bank to Mandalay;
An' I'm learnin' 'ere in London what the ten-year soldier tells:
"If you've 'eard the East a-callin', you won't never 'eed naught else."
No! you won't 'eed nothin' else
But them spicy garlic smells,
An' the sunshine an' the palm-trees an' the tinkly temple-bells;
On the road to Mandalay...

I am sick o' wastin' leather on these gritty pavin'-stones,
An' the blasted Henglish drizzle wakes the fever in my bones;
Tho' I walks with fifty 'ousemaids outer Chelsea to the Strand,
An' they talks a lot o' lovin', but wot do they understand?
Beefy face an' grubby 'and—
Law! wot do they understand?
I've a neater, sweeter maiden in a cleaner, greener land!
On the road to Mandalay...

Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,
Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a thirst;
For the temple-bells are callin', an' it's there that I would be—
By the old Moulmein Pagoda, looking lazy at the sea;
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the old Flotilla lay,
With our sick beneath the awnings when we went to Mandalay!
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin'-fishes play,
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China 'crost the Bay!

VOCABULARY

pagoda — a tiered tower used as a temple

cheroot — a cigar cut square at both ends

flotilla — a small fleet of boats

hathis — elephants (Hindi)

teak — a hard tropical wood

Suez — the canal dividing Europe from Asia, here a symbol of the East

drizzle — light rain

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where is the speaker now, and where does he wish to be? How do you know?

2. List three sensory details the speaker remembers about Burma.

3. How does the speaker describe London and the women there? What is the contrast?

4. What does he mean by "If you've 'eard the East a-callin', you won't never 'eed naught else"?

5. Is the speaker's picture of Burma realistic, or idealized? Use evidence.

WRITING PROMPT

Write 8–12 lines about a place you miss, using a refrain like "On the road to Mandalay".

Mandalay — Answer Key

1. He is “learnin’ ‘ere in London” and wants to go back “to Mandalay”, “somewheres east of Suez”.
2. Examples: “the temple-bells”, “the wind is in the palm-trees”, “the dawn comes up like thunder”, “spicy garlic smells”, “hathis pilin’ teak”.
3. “the blasted Henglish drizzle”, “gritty pavin’-stones”, housemaids with “Beefy face an’ grubby ‘and”; dull and cold versus warm and exotic.
4. Once you have lived in the East, nothing else will satisfy you.
5. Mostly idealized: he describes it as a place where “there aren’t no Ten Commandments” and recalls only pleasures; it is a nostalgic, exoticized view.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/mandalay-rudyard-kipling/