

Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

We Are Seven

by William Wordsworth

Grades 6–9 • Common Core RL.7.6, RL.7.2, RL.7.4

“We Are Seven” was published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by Wordsworth and Coleridge. It is a ballad in quatrains that tells a story through a conversation between an adult narrator and an eight-year-old girl.



THE POEM

- A simple Child,
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?
- 5 I met a little cottage Girl:
She was eight years old, she said;
Her hair was thick with many a curl
That clustered round her head.
- She had a rustic, woodland air,
10 And she was wildly clad:
Her eyes were fair, and very fair;
—Her beauty made me glad.
- “Sisters and brothers, little Maid,
How many may you be?”
- 15 “How many? Seven in all,” she said,
And wondering looked at me.
- “And where are they? I pray you tell.”
She answered, “Seven are we;
And two of us at Conway dwell,
20 And two are gone to sea.
- “Two of us in the church-yard lie,
My sister and my brother;
And, in the church-yard cottage, I
Dwell near them with my mother.”
- 25 “You say that two at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea,
Yet ye are seven! I pray you tell,
Sweet Maid, how this may be.”

Then did the little Maid reply,
 30 “Seven boys and girls are we;
 Two of us in the church-yard lie,
 Beneath the church-yard tree.”
 “You run about, my little Maid,
 Your limbs they are alive;
 35 If two are in the church-yard laid,
 Then ye are only five.”
 “Their graves are green, they may be seen,”
 The little Maid replied,
 “Twelve steps or more from my mother’s door,
 40 And they are side by side.
 “My stockings there I often knit,
 My kerchief there I hem;
 And there upon the ground I sit,
 And sing a song to them.
 45 “And often after sun-set, Sir,
 When it is light and fair,
 I take my little porringer,
 And eat my supper there.
 “The first that died was sister Jane;
 50 In bed she moaning lay,
 Till God released her of her pain;
 And then she went away.
 “So in the church-yard she was laid;
 And, when the grass was dry,
 55 Together round her grave we played,
 My brother John and I.
 “And when the ground was white with snow,
 And I could run and slide,
 My brother John was forced to go,
 60 And he lies by her side.”
 “How many are you, then,” said I,
 “If they two are in heaven?”
 Quick was the little Maid’s reply,
 “O Master! we are seven.”
 65 “But they are dead; those two are dead!
 Their spirits are in heaven!”
 ‘Twas throwing words away; for still
 The little Maid would have her will,
 And said, “Nay, we are seven!”

VOCABULARY

rustic — of the countryside, simple

clad — dressed

Conway — a town in Wales

church-yard — a graveyard next to a church

kerchief — a cloth worn on the head or neck
porringer — a small bowl for porridge or soup

'Twas — it was

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What question does the poem ask in the first stanza?

2. How does the girl count to seven? Who are the seven?

3. What does the narrator argue, and why does he say “ye are only five”?

4. Find two things the girl does at the graves. What do they show about how she sees her dead siblings?

5. Who “wins” the argument? Does Wordsworth seem to side with the girl or the narrator?

WRITING PROMPT

Write a short dialogue poem or scene between a child and an adult who see something differently (a pet that has died, a move, a lost friend). Let each speaker keep their view.

We Are Seven — Answer Key

1. What should a simple child, full of life, “know of death?”
2. Two “at Conway dwell,” two “are gone to sea,” two “in the church-yard lie,” plus herself: seven children.
3. He thinks the dead should not be counted: “If two are in the church-yard laid, / Then ye are only five.”
4. She knits, hems her kerchief, sits and sings “a song to them,” and eats her supper there. She still treats them as part of her family.
5. Neither convinces the other; “’Twas throwing words away” and she still says “Nay, we are seven!” Wordsworth seems to admire the child’s simple faith that the dead are still with us.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/we-are-seven-william-wordsworth/