Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



# Auguries of Innocence

*by William Blake*

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

Blake wrote "Auguries of Innocence" around 1803; it was not published in his lifetime. An "augury" is a sign or omen. After the opening four lines, the poem is mostly rhyming couplets that list how small wrongs (caging a robin, starving a dog) connect to heaven, hell and the fate of nations. Because it is long (over 100 lines), your teacher may assign sections. Read the famous opening carefully, then sample the animal couplets and the closing lines about joy, woe and seeing "with" the eye.

## THE POEM

To see the world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower;
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.

A Robin Redbreast in a cage
Puts all Heaven in a rage;
A dove-house filled with doves and pigeons
Shudders hell through all its regions.
A dog starved at his master's gate
Predicts the ruin of the state;
A game-cock clipped and armed for fight
Doth the rising sun affright;
A horse misused upon the road
Calls to Heaven for human blood.
Every wolf's and lion's howl
Raises from hell a human soul;
Each outcry of the hunted hare
A fibre from the brain doth tear;
A skylark wounded on the wing
Doth make a cherub cease to sing.
He who shall hurt the little wren
Shall never be beloved by men;
He who the ox to wrath has moved
Shall never be by woman loved;
He who shall train the horse to war
Shall never pass the Polar Bar.
The wanton boy that kills the fly
Shall feel the spider's enmity;
He who torments the chafer's sprite
Weaves a bower in endless night.
The caterpillar on the leaf
Repeats to thee thy mother's grief;
The wild deer wandering here and there
Keep the human soul from care;
The lamb misused breeds public strife,
And yet forgives the butcher's knife.
Kill not the moth nor butterfly,
For the last judgment draweth nigh;
The beggar's dog and widow's cat,
Feed them and thou shalt grow fat.
Every tear from every eye
Becomes a babe in eternity;
The bleat, the bark, bellow, and roar,
Are waves that beat on heaven's shore.

The bat that flits at close of eve
Has left the brain that won't believe;
The owl that calls upon the night
Speaks the unbeliever's fright.
The gnat that sings his summer's song
Poison gets from Slander's tongue;
The poison of the snake and newt
Is the sweat of Envy's foot;
The poison of the honey-bee
Is the artist's jealousy;
The strongest poison ever known
Came from Cæsar's laurel-crown.

Nought can deform the human race
Like to the armourer's iron brace;
The soldier armed with sword and gun
Palsied strikes the summer's sun.
When gold and gems adorn the plough,
To peaceful arts shall Envy bow.
The beggar's rags fluttering in air
Do to rags the heavens tear;
The prince's robes and beggar's rags
Are toadstools on the miser's bags.

One mite wrung from the labourer's hands
Shall buy and sell the miser's lands,
Or, if protected from on high,
Shall that whole nation sell and buy;
The poor man's farthing is worth more
Than all the gold on Afric's shore.
The whore and gambler, by the state
Licensed, build that nation's fate;
The harlot's cry from street to street
Shall weave Old England's winding sheet;
The winner's shout, the loser's curse,
Shall dance before dead England's hearse.

He who mocks the infant's faith
Shall be mocked in age and death;
He who shall teach the child to doubt
The rotting grave shall ne'er get out;
He who respects the infant's faith
Triumphs over hell and death.
The babe that weeps the rod beneath
Writes revenge in realms of death.
The babe is more than swaddling-bands
Throughout all these human lands;
Tools were made, and born were hands,
Every farmer understands.

The questioner who sits so sly
Shall never know how to reply;
He who replies to words of doubt
Doth put the light of knowledge out;
A riddle, or the cricket's cry,
Is to doubt a fit reply.
The child's toys and the old man's reasons
Are the fruits of the two seasons.
The emmet's inch and eagle's mile
Make lame philosophy to smile.
A truth that's told with bad intent
Beats all the lies you can invent.
He who doubts from what he sees
Will ne'er believe, do what you please;
If the sun and moon should doubt,
They'd immediately go out.

Every night and every morn
Some to misery are born;
Every morn and every night
Some are born to sweet delight;
Some are born to sweet delight,
Some are born to endless night.
Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine;
Under every grief and pine
Runs a joy with silken twine.
It is right it should be so;
Man was made for joy and woe;
And, when this we rightly know,
Safely through the world we go.

We are led to believe a lie
When we see with not through the eye,
Which was born in a night to perish in a night
When the soul slept in beams of light.
God appears and God is light
To those poor souls who dwell in night;
But doth a human form display
To those who dwell in realms of day.

## VOCABULARY

**augury** — a sign or omen of what will happen

**infinity** — endlessness; that which has no limit

**wanton** — cruelly careless

**chafer** — a kind of beetle

**mite / farthing** — tiny amounts of money

**winding sheet** — a cloth wrapped around a dead body

**emmet** — an ant

**pine** — deep sorrow; also to waste away with grief

**twine** — a thread twisted together

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain the opening four lines. What does Blake claim a person should be able to see?

2. Choose two animal couplets (for example the robin, the dog, the hare or the lamb). What pattern do they share: what happens on earth, and what answers in heaven or hell?

3. Find one couplet about money or the poor (beggar, labourer, farthing). What is Blake saying about wealth and justice?

4. “Joy and woe are woven fine, / A clothing for the soul divine.” What does this claim about human life?

5. The poem ends: “We are led to believe a lie / When we see with not through the eye.” What is the difference between seeing “with” and “through” the eye?

## WRITING PROMPT

Write 8–12 original couplets in Blake’s pattern: a small everyday wrong or kindness on the first line, and a big spiritual or social consequence on the second. Open with your own four-line “to see…” stanza.

# Auguries of Innocence — Answer Key

1. That the smallest things (a grain of sand, a wild flower) can reveal the whole world, heaven, infinity and eternity—if we look rightly.
2. Cruelty or care on earth brings a matching answer above or below: “A Robin Redbreast in a cage / Puts all Heaven in a rage”; “A dog starved at his master’s gate / Predicts the ruin of the state”; “Each outcry of the hunted hare / A fibre from the brain doth tear.” Small lives and the cosmos are linked.
3. Examples: “One mite wrung from the labourer’s hands / Shall buy and sell the miser’s lands”; “The poor man’s farthing is worth more / Than all the gold on Afric’s shore.” Wronging the poor is cosmically costly; their little is worth more than hoarded gold.
4. Happiness and sorrow are twisted together as the soul’s clothing; both belong to a full human life. “Man was made for joy and woe,” and knowing that helps us “Safely through the world we go.”
5. Seeing “with” the eye is only outer looking; seeing “through” it means looking past the surface into spiritual truth. Trusting only the surface “lie” blinds us.

*Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/auguries-of-innocence-william-blake/*