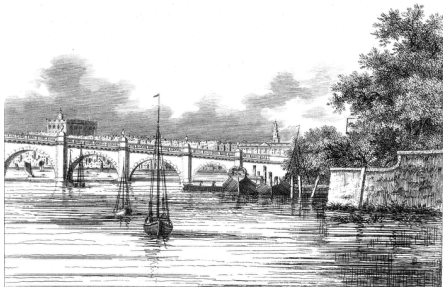
Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802

by William Wordsworth

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

Wordsworth crossed Westminster Bridge early one morning in the summer of 1802 on his way to France with his sister Dorothy (the date in the title is not exact). The sonnet was published in 1807. It is a Petrarchan sonnet: an octave and a sestet, in iambic pentameter.

THE POEM

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

VOCABULARY

fair — beautiful

majesty — grandeur, royal dignity

garment — a piece of clothing

bare — uncovered, open

smokeless — free of smoke (before the city's fires were lit)

steep — soak, bathe

splendour — brilliant light, magnificence

glideth — moves smoothly

will — wish, desire

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What claim does the speaker make in the first line?

2. Explain the simile in lines 4–5. How does the city "wear" the morning?

3. List the things the speaker sees in line 6. Why is the air "smokeless"?

4. In the sestet, what does the speaker compare the city's morning to?

5. What is "that mighty heart," and why is it "lying still"? Is this image peaceful or unsettling?

WRITING PROMPT

Choose a busy place (a school hallway, a mall, a highway) and imagine it at dawn before anyone arrives. Write a poem of 10–14 lines describing its unexpected beauty.

Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802 — Answer Key

1. “Earth has not anything to show more fair”: nothing on earth is more beautiful than this view.
2. “This City now doth, like a garment, wear / The beauty of the morning”: the morning light covers the city like a beautiful piece of clothing.
3. “Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples.” It is early, before people have lit fires and factories have started.
4. To nature: the sun never shone more beautifully on “valley, rock, or hill,” and he never felt “a calm so deep.”
5. The heart of London (its people and life), still asleep. Mostly peaceful, though “lying still” can also hint at death; accept supported answers.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/composed-upon-westminster-bridge-september-3-1802-william-wordsworth/