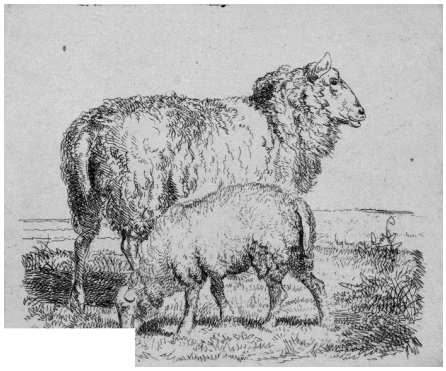
Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



The Echoing Green

by William Blake

Grades 5–8 · Common Core RL.6.4, RL.6.2, RL.6.5

"The Echoing Green" appeared in Blake's Songs of Innocence (1789). It has three ten-line stanzas. The green is a village common where people gather. The poem moves through one day: sunrise and games, old people watching, then dusk and rest. Compare the last line of each stanza: "echoing green" becomes "darkening green."

THE POEM

The sun does arise,
And make happy the skies;
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring;
The skylark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around
To the bells' cheerful sound;
While our sports shall be seen
On the echoing green.

Old John, with white hair,
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak,
Among the old folk.
They laugh at our play,
And soon they all say,
'Such, such were the joys
When we all—girls and boys—
In our youth-time were seen
On the echoing green.'

Till the little ones, weary,
No more can be merry:
The sun does descend,
And our sports have an end.
Round the laps of their mothers
Many sisters and brothers,
Like birds in their nest,
Are ready for rest,
And sport no more seen
On the darkening green.

VOCABULARY

thrush — a songbird

oak — a large, long-lived tree

youth-time — childhood and youth

weary — tired

descend — go down

darkening — growing dark

echoing — filled with repeated sound; lively and ringing

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What welcomes the Spring in stanza 1? How does the mood feel?

2. Who is Old John, and what do the old folk say as they watch the children?

3. How does the day end in stanza 3? What image does Blake use for the resting children?

4. Trace the refrain: “On the echoing green” / “On the echoing green” / “On the darkening green.” What does the change suggest?

5. Is this only a happy poem, or does the ending hint at something more? Explain.

WRITING PROMPT

Write a three-stanza poem about a playground, park or yard from morning to evening. End each stanza with a short refrain that changes slightly, the way Blake’s green does.

The Echoing Green — Answer Key

1. The sun, “merry bells,” and birds (“skylark and thrush,” “birds of the bush”) singing “To the bells’ cheerful sound.” The mood is joyful and busy.
2. An old man “with white hair” who “does laugh away care” under the oak with other old folk. They say, “‘Such, such were the joys / When we all—girls and boys— / In our youth-time were seen / On the echoing green.’”
3. The children grow weary; the sun descends; sports end. They gather “Round the laps of their mothers ... Like birds in their nest,” “ready for rest.”
4. The green stays lively through the day, then darkens. The change marks the end of play and hints that youth and joy do not last forever.
5. Accept both: it celebrates innocent play and the cycle of generations; the “darkening green” and the old folk’s memory also suggest aging and the end of the day (or of childhood).

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/the-echoing-green-william-blake/