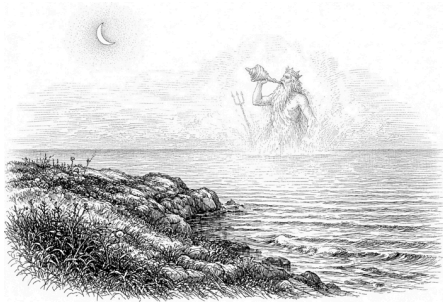
Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



The World Is Too Much with Us

by William Wordsworth

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

Wordsworth wrote the sonnet around 1802 and published it in 1807, as factories and cities grew during the Industrial Revolution. It is a Petrarchan sonnet: the octave describes the problem; the sestet begins mid-line with "Great God!" Proteus and Triton are sea gods from Greek myth.

THE POEM

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune,
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

VOCABULARY

late and soon — all the time, early and late

lay waste — ruin, destroy

sordid — selfish and shameful

boon — a gift or benefit

Pagan — someone following an old, non-Christian religion

suckled — raised, nourished (like a baby)

creed — a set of beliefs

outworn — out of date

lea — a meadow

forlorn — sad and lonely

wreathed — twisted, coiled

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does “Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers” mean?

2. What is the “sordid boon” we have given our hearts away for?

3. Name two images of nature in lines 5–7. How do people react to them?

4. Why would the speaker “rather be / A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn”?

5. Does this poem still apply today? Give one modern example.

WRITING PROMPT

Write a sonnet or 14-line poem about something people today are “out of tune” with. Turn halfway through with an exclamation.

The World Is Too Much with Us — Answer Key

1. By constantly earning and buying, we waste our energy and abilities.
2. Material things and money; trading our feelings for them is a shameful bargain.
3. Any two: “This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon,” “The winds that will be howling at all hours,” winds “up-gathered now like sleeping flowers.” People are “out of tune”: “It moves us not.”
4. An ancient Pagan might at least see nature as alive and holy, glimpsing gods like Proteus and Triton, and feel “less forlorn.”
5. Accept supported examples, e.g. phones, shopping, overwork.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/the-world-is-too-much-with-us-william-wordsworth/