



Dark and the Taper

Year 6: Home Learning for English

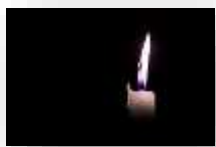
2-weeks of poetry-based activities for pupils in isolation following a positive Covid test

Please complete the activities in your English book

You can look forward to sharing what you have done with your teacher and other children in your class when you return to school

PART 1

We will be using these poems by Tony Mitton as a starting point for our work. You can read more poems by Tony in his books Plum and Come into this Poem. Find out more about Tony on his website: http://www.tonymitton.co.uk/	About this poem Technical aspects: The poem begins with a two-line riddle: <i>When light is bright/ where does dark hide?</i> There then follows a series of fast-paced rhyming answers – two beats to a line with a sort of ‘now-you-see-me-now-you-don’t’ bouncing rhythm until we suddenly come up against the two questions in the last stanza and the final, stark ending. Dark is personified, but in a vague, slightly spooky way. Dark can <u>do</u> things – hide, wait patiently etc. but it is not exactly described, and it is elusive – <i>oh, what is its name?</i>
Dark When light is bright where does dark hide? Inside a sack. Down in each crack. Shadowy, mischievous, secretive, black. Tucked in a corner. Under a lid. Rolled in the fold of a cloth it lies hid. Down in the cellar, up in the loft, dark waits so patiently, silent and soft. Inside your slipper or deep in your pocket, dark settles waiting for night to unlock it. It's inside the cupboard, it's under the bed. Just close up your eyes and it's inside your head. At the flick of a switch, at the death of a flame, what lies a-waiting, oh, what is its name? At the pull of a blind, at the blink of a spark, what fills the emptiness? Yes, it's the dark! There's nothing below it, there's nothing above it. It won't go away so I'm learning to love it. For, surely the dark should hold nothing to fear, as it's deep in the throat and it's down in the ear. And dark has a quality soothing and deep: it holds you and folds you and lulls you to sleep. But what does its velvety voice sound like? Hark! Nothing but silence is spoken by dark. It's what you emerge from, the place before birth. And it waits to receive as they spade on the earth. Is it an enemy? Is it a friend? Dark, ever faithful, is there at the end.	Day 1 Read Dark and perform it for someone at home (maybe with curtains closed and a torchlight on your face) Let your performance show how the poem starts playfully like a game of hide and seek but gets more thoughtful and quieter at the end. The poem says at the end that Dark could be an enemy or a friend. Make two lists: Dark is an enemy because ... Dark is a friend because.... Try to think of at least 5 reasons for each. Day 2 Write a character description as if Dark were a person. What would they be like? What would Dark's voice sound like? How would Dark move? Where would Dark live? What does Dark eat? Include: Physical appearance and clothing - Height? Posture? Cloak? Coat? Veil? etc. NB We are not thinking about skin colour - Dark in this poem is nothing to do with race. It is an absence of light. Day 3 Synonyms and antonyms: Find some synonyms (similar words) for shadowy mischievous secretive soothing lulls velvety silence dark faithful enemy Find some antonyms (opposites) for each of these same 10 words You may like to extend the list with other words from the poem. Day 4 and Day 5 Writing a poem: Darkness is often thought of as something negative. Collect ideas for a poem called: In Praise of Darkness In your poem Dark can be addressed and praised as a person. Here is an example by Annie Fisher In Praise of Darkness <i>Praise to you Dark, you show us the stars, you show us the glorious colours of fireworks, you coax the badger and the fox out to play in the moonlight...</i> Extension: There are many expressions (sometimes called idioms) linked to the dark. For example: <i>the darkest hour before dawn</i> <i>a shot in the dark</i> <i>to whistle in the dark</i> Find out what these expressions mean. If you have access to a computer see if you can find other expressions/idioms about the dark and note down their meanings too.



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PART 2

About this poem

Tony Mitton says:

This is an old Japanese tale which tells of a hermit poet. When he saw how fatally attracted the moths and insects were to the flame of his reading taper, he put it out and sat in the dark to spare their lives.

Technical aspects: The poem is written in **long rhymed sentences** - taper/paper, night/light etc. There is much repetition and alliteration of the **f** sound - flickering, flapping, flittery, flew, fire, suffer etc. As you read it emphasise the **f** sound and you will hear how it mimics the sound of the flame being snuffed out.

The lines of the poem are long, graceful and meditative, until we reach stanza 7.

The line here is shorter; the **metre** seems to shift as the hermit poet is suddenly struck by the realisation of what he must do.

The Taper

The poet sat reading, alone in his hut,
by the light of a flickering taper.

The shadows played gracefully, stretching
their shapes
on the luminous face of the paper.

Then in from the darkness came flying
and flapping
a flittery creature of night.

It circled the flame of the taper, entranced
by the dangerous dance of the light.

The poet's attention was torn from his page
as the creature flew into the fire.

And he sat for a moment and thought
on the strangeness
of dangerous thrill and desire.

'I would sit here reading,'
said the poet,
'by the taper's flickering light.

But I see how the flame entices,
as they all glimpse it,
the fluttering creatures of night.

And I see how they suffer,
frantically flapping,
as fire bites into their wings,

Until I can no longer relish,
for all of its virtues,
the knowledge my bright light brings.

And so I shall blow out the taper,
and then with moist fingers
I'll snuff out its dwindling spark,

To sit in the silence,
enlightened, and reading
the ponderous book of the dark.'

Day 6

Read The Taper and the notes about the poem. Use a dictionary to find the meaning of these words and write them in your book:

**taper hermit ponderous dwindling
luminous entices entrance**

You can hear Tony Mitton reading this poem on his website:

www.tonymitton.co.uk

Perform the poem as if you are the poet/hermit in the poem - maybe sitting cross-legged on the floor - if you have adult supervision you may like to perform it in candlelight.

Day 6

Have you ever seen a moth? Go outside with an adult and stand near a light - have any moths been attracted to it?

Write a fact file about moths.

Can you find out about their lifecycle? Habitats? Diet?

Which is your favourite moth and why?

Day 7 and Day 8

Write a descriptive poem about a moth flying round a candle flame. Use lots of alliteration. For example:

Moth flaps, flutters and flickers in the darkness

Moth loves the licking flames of light

Moth is magnetised and mesmerised...

Write your poem out in your best handwriting and add an illustration ready to share with other people when you return to school.

Day 9 and Day 10

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.

Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

The hermit poet in Tony Mitton's poem may have been pondering words such as these from a famous speech by Martin Luther King.

Make a list of things that may trouble you and what you think can drive them out. For example:

Only food can drive out hunger,

Only courage can drive out fear,

Only a friend can drive out loneliness,

Only giving can drive out...

Choose the most effective to make a poem. It could have a title such as *Only Light*. It could begin or end with the words above from Martin Luther King.

Again - write your poem out in your best handwriting and add an illustration ready to share with other people when you return to school.