

A mysterious story poem



Read this poem aloud.

The Listeners

“Is there anybody there?” said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
Of the forest’s ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
Above the Traveller’s head:
And he smote upon the door again a second time;
“Is there anybody there?” he said.
But no one descended to the Traveller;
No head from the leaf-fringed sill
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
Where he stood perplexed and still.
But only a host of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
To that voice from the world of men:
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
That goes down to the empty hall,
Harkening in an air stirred and shaken
By the lonely Traveller’s call.



And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
Their stillness answering his cry,
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
’Neath the starred and leafy sky;
For he suddenly smote on the door, even
Louder, and lifted his head: –
“Tell them I came, and no one answered,
That I kept my word,” he said.
Never the least stir made the listeners,
Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
From the one man left awake:
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward,
When the plunging hoofs were gone.



Walter de la Mare

This poem seems to be part of a longer mystery story. Why is it mysterious?

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Understanding the poem

Answer these questions about the **poem** *The Listeners*.

Where does this part of the story happen?

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When does it happen (day or night)? Which words tell you this?

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In your opinion, who or what are “The Listeners”?

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The Traveller speaks in this **poem**. What are his words?

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How does the first line of the **poem** make you feel?

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What do you notice about the sounds in the third and fourth lines,

And his horse in the silence champed the grasses

Of the forest’s ferny floor

and what does this tell you about the horse’s behavior?



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Make a list of the **adjectives** that are used to describe the Traveller.

Remember: An **adjective** is a describing word.

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Understanding the poem



Answer these further questions about the poem *The Listeners*.

Find the meanings of the old-fashioned words in the **poem**. Then write down why you think the poet chose these words.

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Read the **poem** again, looking at the lines and listening for the **rhymes**. How would you describe the **rhyming pattern**?

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Count the **syllables** in the first eight lines – can you find a **rhythmic pattern**? What is it?

Remember: A **syllable** is a word or part of a word that is one beat long.

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Writing practice

Choose a section from the **poem** and write it here.

Remember: Join your letters carefully and space your words evenly.

Begin new lines in the same places as in the printed **poem**.



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Walter de la Mare

This **poem** seems to be part of a longer mystery story. Why is it mysterious?

The poem seems mysterious because neither the Traveller nor the reader
know why the people who live in the house are not there.

Listen to your child read the poem, helping where necessary with any difficult words. Encourage him or her to reread the poem, this time thinking about its meaning. Accept any answer that can be justified by some aspect of the poem.



Understanding the poem

Answer these questions about the **poem** *The Listeners* .

Where does this part of the story happen?

This part of the story happens by a house in a forest.

When does it happen (day or night)? Which words tell you this?

It happens at night. The words moonlit, moonlight, moonbeams, dark, starred, shadowiness, and left awake tell me so.

In your opinion, who or what are “The Listeners”?

The Listeners are ghosts.

Answers may vary

The Traveller speaks in this **poem**. What are his words?

“Is there anybody there?”

“Tell them I came, and no one answered, That I kept my word.”

How does the first line of the **poem** make you feel?

The first line makes me feel curious to know if anybody is there.

What do you notice about the sounds in the third and fourth lines,

*And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
Of the forest’s ferny floor*

and what does this tell you about the horse’s behavior?



There are a lot of “s” and “f” sounds in the third and fourth lines. The horse’s eating made soft sounds in the quiet night.

Make a list of the **adjectives** that are used to describe the Traveller.

Remember: An **adjective** is a describing word.

grey (eyes), perplexed, still, lonely

The questions on this page encourage your child to look at the words of the poem carefully and help him or her to develop comprehension skills. Some answers require a subjective response and are acceptable as long as they can be justified.

Understanding the poem



Answer these further questions about the **poem** *The Listeners*.

Find the meanings of the old-fashioned words in the **poem**. Then write down why you think the poet chose these words.

smote – hit; *dwelt* – lived; *hearkening* – listening; *'neath* – beneath; *spake* – spoke;
ay – always. The poet chose these words because they give the poem a sense of
something happening long ago. **Answers may vary**

Read the **poem** again, looking at the lines and listening for the **rhymes**.
How would you describe the **rhyming pattern**?

The poem has a regular pattern of rhyming pairs. Every second line rhymes.
Answers may vary

Count the **syllables** in the first eight lines – can you find a **rhythmic pattern**?
What is it?

Remember: A **syllable** is a word or part of a word that is one beat long.

The poem follows a rhythmic pattern of a long line followed by a shorter line.

Writing practice

Choose a section from the **poem** and write it here.



Remember: Join your letters carefully and space your words evenly.

Begin new lines in the same places as in the printed **poem**.

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Answers may vary

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These exercises relate to the poem *The Listeners*. Defining old words can help improve dictionary skills. Looking at the rhyme and rhythm reveals the poem's structure. Check that your child has copied a section correctly, and check his or her handwriting.