Before Reading

There Will Come Soft Rains
Poem by Sara Teasdale

Meeting at Night
Poem by Robert Browning

The Sound of Night
Poem by Maxine Kumin

What is our place in NATURE?

Are humans more powerful than nature? Think of how we change landscapes, drive other species to extinction, and otherwise use nature for our own ends. Or are humans insignificant in the face of nature’s power?

DISCUSS  Think about a recent encounter you had with nature. What attitude did you express—admiration? indifference? In a small group, discuss your overall attitudes toward nature.
Meet the Authors

Sara Teasdale
1884–1933

Love and War
Sara Teasdale explored the topic of love in all of its aspects. Drawing on her own experiences, she wrote about the beauty, pleasure, fragility, and heartache of love in exquisitely crafted lyric poems. In reaction to World War I, she also wrote antiwar poems, such as “There Will Come Soft Rains.”

Robert Browning
1812–1889

Painter of Portraits
Robert Browning was a master at capturing psychological complexity. Using the dramatic monologue, a poem addressed to a silent listener, he conveyed the personalities of both fictional and historical figures. “Meeting at Night” is one of his shorter lyric poems.

Maxine Kumin
born 1925

Poet of Place
The poetry of Maxine Kumin is rooted in New England rural life. Using traditional verse forms, Kumin explores changes in nature, people’s relationship to the land and its creatures, and human mortality, loss, and survival.

LITERARY ANALYSIS: SOUND DEVICES

One common sound device used in poetry is rhyme, the repetition of sounds at the ends of words. End rhyme is rhyme at the ends of lines, as in this excerpt:

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though.

Another sound device is alliteration, the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginnings of words, as in Droning a drowsy syncopated tune.

Still another sound device is onomatopoeia, the use of words that imitate sounds, as in The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard. As you read the following poems about nature, notice their sound devices. Record examples on a chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>End Rhyme</th>
<th>Alliteration</th>
<th>Onomatopoeia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“There Will Come Soft Rains”</td>
<td>ground / sound (lines 1 and 2)</td>
<td></td>
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READING STRATEGY: READING POETRY

Reading poetry requires paying attention not only to the meaning of the words but to the way they look and sound. The following strategies will help you.

• Notice how the lines are arranged on the page. Are they long lines, or short? Are they grouped into regular stanzas or irregular stanzas, or are they not divided into stanzas at all? Stanza breaks usually signal the start of a new idea.

• Pause in your reading where punctuation marks appear, just as you would when reading prose. Note that in poetry, punctuation does not always occur at the end of a line; a thought may continue for several lines.

• Read a poem aloud several times. As you read, notice whether the rhythm is regular or varied. Is there a rhyme scheme, or regular pattern of end rhyme? For example, you’ll notice that “There Will Come Soft Rains” is written in couplets, two-line units with an aa rhyme scheme. Regular patterns of rhythm and rhyme give a musical quality to poems.

Review: Make Inferences

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum-trees in tremulous white;

Robins will wear their feathery fire
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree
If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
Would scarcely know that we were gone.
The gray sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove\(^1\) with pushing prow\(^2\),
And quench its speed i’ the slushy sand.  

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match,
And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!  

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1. **cove**: a small, partly enclosed body of water.
2. **prow** (prou): the front part of a boat.
And now the dark comes on, all full of chitter noise. Birds huggermugger¹ crowd the trees, the air thick with their vesper² cries, and bats, snub seven-pointed kites, skitter across the lake, swing out, squeak, chirp, dip, and skim on skates of air, and the fat frogs wake and prink wide-lipped, noisy as ducks, drunk on the boozy black, gloating chink-chunk.

And now on the narrow beach we defend ourselves from dark. The cooking done, we build our firework bright and hot and less for outlook than for magic, and lie in our blankets while night nickers around us. Crickets chorus hallelujahs; paws, quiet and quick as raindrops, play on the stones expertly soft, run past and are gone; fish pulse in the lake; the frogs hoarsen.

Now every voice of the hour—the known, the supposed, the strange, the mindless, the witted, the never seen—sing, thrum, impinge,³ and rearrange endlessly; and debarred⁴ from sleep we wait for the birds, importantly silent, for the crease of first eye-licking light, for the sun, lost long ago and sweet. By the lake, locked black away and tight, we lie, day creatures, overhearing night.

1. huggermugger: disorderly.
2. vesper: pertaining to the evening; a type of swallow that sings in the evening.
3. impinge (ɪmˈpɪndʒ): to strike or push upon.
4. debarred: prevented or hindered.
Comprehension

1. **Clarify** According to the speaker in Teasdale’s poem, how would the natural world react if “mankind perished utterly”?

2. **Clarify** Whom does the speaker in Browning’s poem meet when he arrives at his destination?

3. **Clarify** What time and place are described in Kumin’s poem?

Literary Analysis

4. **Reading Poetry** Which poem did you appreciate most when read aloud? Explain the qualities that were brought out in an oral reading.

5. **Analyze Rhyme** Describe how end rhyme is used in each poem. Which poems employ a regular rhyme scheme? What ideas are emphasized through end rhyme? Use a chart like the one shown to plan your answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem</th>
<th>Rhyme Scheme</th>
<th>Important Rhyming Words</th>
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6. **Recognize Alliteration** Which poem makes the most obvious use of alliteration? What feelings or ideas are suggested by these repeated consonant sounds?

7. **Relate Theme and Sound Devices** Describe the qualities of nature conveyed in each poem. How are sound devices used to suggest these qualities? Refer to your sound devices chart to plan your answer.

8. **Draw Conclusions** What does each poem suggest about humans and nature?

Literary Criticism

9. **Critical Interpretations** According to one critic, Teasdale’s poetry “expresses the fragility of human life where the only real certainty comes from nature.” How does this comment apply to “There Will Come Soft Rains”?

**What is our place in NATURE?**

Do you think humans are part of nature? Why or why not?
**Conventions in Writing**

◆ **GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Use Precise Language**

   It is important for writers to choose words that effectively express the rhythm, sound, and imagery they wish to convey to their audience. Notice how Maxine Kumin’s use of **precise verbs** in “The Sound of Night” makes the description livelier and more specific than if she had used verbs such as “fly” or “communicate.”

   and bats, snub seven-pointed kites,
   skitter across the lake, swing out,
   squeak, chirp, dip, and skim on skates
   of air . . . (lines 4–7)

   Careful consideration of word choice can be given to all types of writing, not just poetry. Notice that the revisions in blue are precise verbs that enhance the description in this first draft. Revise your response to the prompt by changing any dull, general verbs to more precise ones.

   **STUDENT MODEL**

   In “There Will Come Soft Rains,” Sara Teasdale urges us to consider that nature will go on long after humans have done away with themselves.

   urges
   annihilated
   done away with

   **READING-WRITING CONNECTION**

   Broaden your understanding of the poems by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tip** to improve your writing.

   **WRITING PROMPT**

   **Extended Response: Interpret Theme**

   Write **three-to-five paragraphs comparing and contrasting the themes of each poem**. In your response, consider the figurative language used in each poem. How does the figurative language reflect the time and place in which the poem was written and help illustrate its theme?

   **REVISING TIP**

   Review your response. Did you use precise language to enhance your comparisons? If not, revise your essay to include precise verbs.