

When You Are Old by W B Yeats

General Understanding

1. Who is the poet speaking to?
2. Does 'When you are old' mean now? When does it mean?
3. What is in '**this book**'? And who is the '**one man**' in the poem?
4. Does he love her at the moment? How deeply? What tells you this?
5. Do you think she loves him as much? What makes you think so?
6. Do you think he wants this poem to change her at all? How?

Language and Atmosphere

7. What feelings do you get from this poem? Which words have this effect?
8. In the main words of the poem, are there more long vowel sounds or short ones? (Especially the rhyming words at the ends of the lines.)
9. How many of the words have only one syllable (which tends to slow down the rhythm)?
10. Which consonants are used more often, sharp sounds like: / p, b, t., d, k, g /, or softer sounds like: / m, l, s, sh, r, f / ?
11. What effect do all these things have on the mood of the poem?

Class Activity in Groups.

(Now the questions are re-arranged to promote discussion in groups of three; 'A's, 'B's & 'C's prepare their set of questions separately in twos or threes; they then regroup in ABC groups, and ask the students from the other two groups their questions in numerical order.

In this way, all the questions receive attention in the end, but each group gains 'privileged' access to the features they focused on in stage one.)

Group A

1. Who is the poet speaking to?
4. Does he love her at the moment? How deeply? What tells you this?
7. What feelings do you get from this poem? Which words have this effect?
10. Which consonants are used more often, sharp sounds like: / p, b, t., d, k, g /, or softer sounds like: / m, l, s, sh, r, f / ?

Group B

2. Does 'When you are old' mean now? When does it mean?
5. Do you think she loves him as much? What makes you think so?
8. In the main words of the poem, are there more long vowel sounds or short ones? (Especially the rhyming words at the ends of the lines.)
11. What effect do all these things have on the mood of the poem?

Group C

3. What is in 'this book'? And who is the 'one man' in the poem?
6. Do you think he wants this poem to change her at all? How?
9. How many of the words have only one syllable (which tends to slow down the rhythm)?

When You Are Old *by W B Yeats*

When you are old and grey and full of sleep
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Remember, a little sadly, how Love fled,
And paced upon the mountains overhead,
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.