Before Reading

Poem on Returning to Dwell in the Country
Poem by T’ao Ch’ien

My Heart Leaps Up
Poem by William Wordsworth

The Sun
Poem by Mary Oliver

Where do you go to GET AWAY from it all?

What does nature do for you? Whether it’s staring at a fishbowl, escaping to the mountains, or simply taking a walk in the park, many people look to nature for beauty, serenity, or rejuvenation. The poems that follow reflect on the experience of basking in the natural world.

QUICKWRITE Make a concept web like the one shown, identifying a part of nature you enjoy and how it makes you feel. Then write a paragraph explaining your thoughts.
Meet the Authors

T’ao Ch’ien
365–427
Grandfather of Chinese Wilderness Poetry
T’ao Ch’ien worked for the government before he returned to his family farm to live as a farmer—a radical decision at the time. His poetry reflects Taoist philosophy, which emphasizes living simply and close to nature. Both his life and his natural, conversational style of poetry inspired many later Chinese writers.

William Wordsworth
1770–1850
England’s Poet of Nature
William Wordsworth grew up in the Lake District of northern England. As a boy, he loved being outdoors and appreciated the natural beauty of the region; this love of nature never left him. His poetry introduced a new view of the relationship between people and nature. Wordsworth became one of the leaders of the Romantic movement in English literature.

Mary Oliver
born 1935
American Celebrant of Nature
Mary Oliver became a distinguished poet and professor without ever having finished college. Her poetry, which links the worlds of people, animals, and plants, has won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award.

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
Poem on Returning to Dwell in the Country

T’ao Ch’ien

In youth I had nothing that matched the vulgar tone,¹
For my nature always loved the hills and mountains.
Inadvertently I fell into the Dusty Net,²
Once having gone it was more than thirteen years.
The tame bird longs for his old forest—
The fish in the house-pond thinks of his ancient pool.
I too will break the soil at the edge of the southern moor,
I will guard simplicity and return to my fields and garden.
My land and house—
a little more than ten acres,
In the thatched cottage—
only eight or nine rooms.
Elms and willows shade the back verandah,
Peach and plum trees in rows before the hall.

¹ matched the vulgar tone: The speaker is saying that he was never coarse or raucous in his youth.
² Dusty Net: a term that refers to being caught up in professional ambition and materialism.

READING POETRY
Consider the images in lines 9–12. Why does the speaker mention the tame bird and the fish in the house-pond?
Hazy and dimly seen
a village in the distance,
Close in the foreground
the smoke of neighbors’ houses.
A dog barks
amidst the deep lanes,
A cock is crowing
atop a mulberry tree.
No dust and confusion
within my doors and courtyard;
In the empty rooms
more than sufficient leisure.
Too long I was held
within the barred cage.
Now I am able
to return again to Nature.

Translated by William Acker

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.\(^1\)

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1. \textit{piety} (pi"-tē); the quality of showing devotion or being reverent.
Have you ever seen anything in your life more wonderful than the way the sun, every evening, relaxed and easy, floats toward the horizon and into the clouds or the hills, or the rumpled sea, and is gone—and how it slides again out of the blackness, every morning, on the other side of the world, like a red flower streaming upward on its heavenly oils, say, on a morning in early summer, at its perfect imperial distance—and have you ever felt for anything such wild love—do you think there is anywhere, in any language, a word billowing enough for the pleasure that fills you, as the sun reaches out, as it warms you as you stand there, empty-handed—or have you too turned from this world—or have you too gone crazy for power, for things?
Comprehension

1. Recall In “Poem on Returning to Dwell in the Country,” what change does the speaker make in his life?

2. Recall In “My Heart Leaps Up,” what does the speaker wish for?

3. Summarize In “The Sun,” what does the speaker regard as the most wonderful thing in life?

Text Analysis

4. Compare and Contrast In “Poem on Returning to Dwell in the Country,” contrast the speaker’s feelings about his former life in the city and his new life in the country. Why does the speaker prefer the country life? Provide evidence from the poem to support your answer.

5. Interpret Meaning “My Heart Leaps Up” includes the famous line “The Child is father of the Man.” Think about how childhood experiences influence the person one becomes as an adult. What do you think the speaker means?

6. Make Inferences What possible influences from the other poems do you see in “The Sun”? Record your answers in a chart like the one shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influences in “The Sun”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>from “Poem on Returning to Dwell in the Country”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from “My Heart Leaps Up”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Analyze Universal Theme Record on a piece of paper the theme reflected in each poem. Then come up with a single theme that all three poems share.

8. Evaluate In your opinion, which poem makes the strongest statement about the power of nature? Cite evidence to support your choice.

Text Criticism

9. Historical Context England’s Romantic poets had a deep reverence for nature. Their work shows an emphasis on imagination, the expression of emotions, and wonder at the world around them. How does Wordsworth’s poem reflect this tradition? To what extent do these traits appear in T’ao Ch’ien’s and Mary Oliver’s poems? Cite evidence to support your answer.

Where do you go to GET AWAY from it all?
Do you have a special place that is all your own?