

Extract from *The Question*
P B Shelley
(1792-1822)

There grew pied wind-flowers and violets,
Daisies, those pearly Arcturi of the earth,
The constellated flower that never sets;
Faint oxlips; tender bluebells, at whose birth
The sod scarce heaved; and that tall flower that wets -
Like a child, half in tenderness and mirth -
Its mother's face with Heaven's collected tears,
When the low wind, its playmate's voice, it hears.

And in the warm hedge grew lush eglantine,
Green cow bind and the moonlight-coloured may,
And cherry-blossoms, and white cups, whose wine
Was the bright dew, yet drained not by the day;
And wild roses, and ivy serpentine,
With its dark buds and leaves, wandering astray;
And flowers azure, black, and streaked with gold,
Fairer than any wakened eyes behold.

And nearer to the river's trembling edge
There grew broad flag-flowers, purple pranked with white,
And starry river buds among the sedge,
And floating water-lilies, broad and bright,
Which lit the oak that overhung the hedge
With moonlight beams of their own watery light;
And bulrushes, and reeds of such deep green
As soothed the dazzled eye with sober sheen.



DISCUSS

This poem tries to create a sense of the countless variety of Nature's flowers. Why are only some flowers named? What does this have to do with the poem's objective?

VOCABULARY

Look up these words in a dictionary and write down their meanings:

pieced, mirth, lush, astray, sod (a swearword!), serpentine, azure, sheen, prank.

COMPREHENSION

1. Arcturus is a star. How are daisies like stars?
2. The poem includes the word "constellated". What noun, connected with stars, does this adjective relate to?
3. "The sod scarce heaved". How does this reinforce the idea of bluebells being wild, natural flowers?
4. What are "Heaven's collected tears"?
5. How do the adjectives "warm" and "lush" increase the sense of Nature's plenty?
6. "Moonlight-coloured". Is this a good adjective for may-blossom?
7. How is ivy "serpentine"? Think of the shape and habit.
8. What does the last line of the second verse have to do with dreams?
9. How are *white water lilies*, *moonlight*, and *watery light* interconnected?
10. "Sober sheen". Try to explain the paradox, or apparent contradiction of these words.

RESEARCH

Find out as much as you can about the flowers named in the poem. Try to identify the un-named flowers.

CREATIVE WRITING

EITHER

1. Make a wall-frieze or collage which recreates the scene described in the poem. Include quotations from the poem, information from your research and pictures.

OR

2. Compare the poet's description of these flowers with the botanical, scientific descriptions from your research notes. How do these two kinds of descriptions vary in vocabulary and style? Make a chart with two columns headed Poetic Description and Scientific Description.

OR

3. Re-write the scene as a scientist's field report.