

Lesson Name : 37

Lesson Title : Thanatopsis

Course Name : English 2 Part 2 [Honors]

Task Id : 54843052

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Essential Instruction



Please read [“Thanatopsis”](#) by William Cullen Bryant.

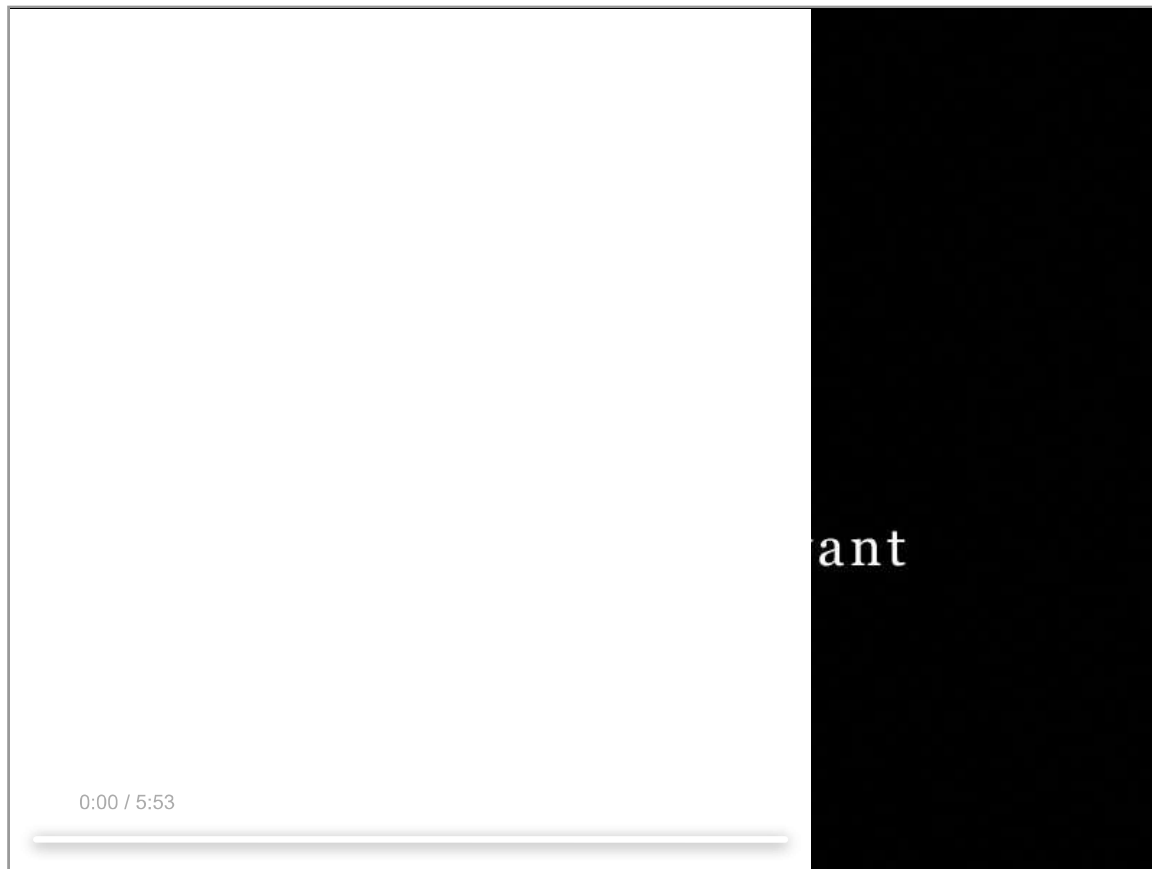
Use your digital notebook to keep notes on new vocabulary and definitions that you may need to reference later.

Identifying Themes in Literature

Let’s start this lesson by defining the concept of a **theme**. Essentially, a **theme** is the guiding or defining idea of a literary work. Sometimes, a **theme** can be thought of as the moral, message, or lesson that comes through a work. For example, many young adult novels focus on the theme of *coming of age* – what it means to leave childhood behind and begin the journey to adulthood. Literary critics, people who study and comment on literature, often compare works with similar **themes** to point out similarities and differences.

Today’s reading, the poem “Thanatopsis” by William Cullen Bryant, discusses two of the most universal **themes** in literature: nature and death. Bryant tells his readers that death is part of a natural cycle – that, when we die, we become part of the earth and become equal to the great men and women who have gone before us. The poem’s title actually means “meditation on death.”

Bryant approached these concepts from the point of view of the Romantic Movement, which tended to glorify nature and focus on issues such as the past and the supernatural. Bryant also approached the concepts of death and nature from the viewpoint of a teenager. Although we can’t be exactly sure then “Thanatopsis” was written, Bryant was probably between seventeen and nineteen years old at the time.



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Vocabulary

Following are five vocabulary words from “Thanatopsis.” Be sure to add the unfamiliar words to your digital notebook and/or word bank for future reference.

1. **blight** – noun – something that frustrates plans or hopes; something that impairs or destroys
2. **hoary** – adj. – extremely old; ancient
3. **swain** – noun – a rustic peasant
4. **vale** – noun – valley
5. **venerable** – adj. – calling forth respect through age, character and attainments