A mysterious story poem

Read this poem aloud.

The Listeners

"Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
Of the forest's ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
Above the Traveller's head:
And he smote upon the door again a second time;
"Is there anybody there?" he said.
But no one descended to the Traveller;
No head from the leaf-fringed sill
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
Where he stood perplexed and still.
But only a host of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
To that voice from the world of men:
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
That goes down to the empty hall,
Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken
By the lonely Traveller's call.

And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
Their stillness answering his cry,
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
'Neath the starred and leafy sky;
For he suddenly smote on the door, even
Louder, and lifted his head:
"Tell them I came, and no one answered,
That I kept my word," he said.
Never the least stir made the listeners,
Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
From the one man left awake:
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward,
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

Walter de la Mare

This poem seems to be part of a longer mystery story. Why is it mysterious?
Understanding the poem

Answer these questions about the poem called The Listeners.

Where does this part of the story happen?

When does it happen (day or night)? Which words tell you this?

In your opinion, who or what are “The Listeners”?

The Traveller speaks in this poem. What are his words?

How does the first line of the poem make you feel?

What do you notice about the sounds in the third and fourth lines, 
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses 
Of the forest’s ferny floor 
and what does this tell you about the horse’s behaviour?

Make a list of the adjectives that are used to describe the Traveller. 
Remember: An adjective is a describing word.

What words did the writer use to capture your interest?

Find the meanings of the old-fashioned words in the poem. Then write down why you think the poet chose these words.

Read the poem again, looking at the lines and listening for the rhymes. 
How would you describe the rhyming pattern?

Count the syllables in the first eight lines – can you find a rhythmic pattern? What is it? 
Remember: A syllable is a word or part of a word that is one beat long.

Writing practice

Choose a section from the poem and write it here. 
Remember: Join your letters carefully and space your words evenly. 
Begin new lines in the same places as in the printed poem.

Suitable for 7–8 years | Check the last page of this pack for the correct answers

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Available now
A mysterious story poem

Read this poem aloud.

The Listeners

"Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller, knocking on the moonlit door; And his horse in the silence champed the grasses

When the plunging hoofs were gone.

And the sound of iron on stone,

And he felt in his heart their strangeness,

"Tell them I came, and no one answered, That I kept my word," he said.

That I kept my word," he said.

Tell them I came, and no one answered, That I kept my word.

"Is there anybody there?" he said.

That I kept my word," he said.

Tell them I came, and no one answered,

And he felt in his heart their strangeness,

That I kept my word," he said.

Tell them I came, and no one answered, That I kept my word.

"Is there anybody there?" he said.

That I kept my word," he said.

Tell them I came, and no one answered, That I kept my word.

"Is there anybody there?" he said.

And he hummed them strangely, While his horse moved, crooping the dark turf, Neatly the startled and weary sky; For he suddenly smote on the door, even

Though every word he spake

And his horse in the silence champed the grasses

When the plunging hoofs were gone.

Walter de la Mare

Listen to your child read the poem, helping where necessary with any difficult words. Encourage him or her to reread the poem, this time thinking about its meaning. Accept any answer that can be justified by some aspect of the poem.

Understanding the poem

Answer these further questions about the poem on page 11.

What is the story about?

What does it happen (day or night)? Which words tell you this?

When does it happen (day or night)? Which words tell you this?

Where does this story happen?

If you think the poem is set at night, which words tell you why?

What do you notice about the sounds in the third and fourth lines?

What is it?

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"Tell them I came, and no one answered, That I kept my word." How does the first line of the poem make you feel?

The first line makes me feel curious to know if anybody is there.

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