The Rime of the Ancient Mariner
Poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Meet the Author

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is famous for composing “Kubla Khan” and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” considered two of the greatest English poems. As a critic and philosopher, he may have done more than any other writer to spread the ideas of the English romantic movement.

Precocious Reader  The youngest of ten children, Coleridge grew up feeling rejected by his distant mother and bullied by his older brother Frank. These early experiences gave rise to feelings of insecurity and loneliness that plagued Coleridge throughout life. Despite his self-doubt, Coleridge was an exceptional student who impressed classmates with his eloquence, his knowledge of classical languages, and his flair for writing poetry.

Restless Youth  At Cambridge University, Coleridge continued to read widely and hone his craft. Troubled by debt, though, he left Cambridge in 1793 and enlisted in the 15th Dragoons, a British army regiment, under the alias Silas Tomkyn Comberbache. After being rescued by his brothers, Coleridge returned to Cambridge, but he left again, in 1794, without having earned a degree. That year, Coleridge met the author Robert Southey, and together they dreamed about establishing a utopian community in the Pennsylvania wilderness of America. Southey, however, backed out of the project, and their dream was never realized.

Dream Poem  In 1795, Coleridge developed a close friendship with the poet William Wordsworth. Inspired by the encouragement and intellectual stimulation he received from Wordsworth, Coleridge entered his most creative period. Over the next few years, he produced a series of extraordinary poems, four of which appeared along with poems by Wordsworth in Lyrical Ballads (1798). Coleridge said that when they had planned this landmark collection, “it was agreed that my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic. . . .”

Lyrical Ballads opens with “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” Coleridge got the idea for the poem from a friend who had dreamed about a skeleton ship. Before composing it, Coleridge discussed the poem extensively with Wordsworth, who contributed several plot ideas and even a few lines of verse.

DID YOU KNOW?

Samuel Taylor Coleridge . . .

- developed a fascination with the supernatural at age five.
- was known as a brilliant and captivating conversationalist.
- was the most influential literary critic of his day.
- liked to write poetry while walking.
POETIC FORM: LITERARY BALLAD

“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is a celebrated literary ballad, or narrative poem written in deliberate imitation of the traditional folk ballad (see page 217). Like older ballads, Coleridge’s masterpiece features sensational subject matter—the perilous journey of an old sailor. It also contains other conventional elements: dialogue, repetition of words and phrases, and strong patterns of rhyme and rhythm. However, there are aspects of the poem that reflect Coleridge’s own romantic writing style: his emphasis on the supernatural, his sophisticated use of sound devices, and his use of archaic language. For example, notice his description of a mysterious ghost ship:

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
And still it neared and neared:
As if it dodged a water-sprite,
It plunged, and tacked and veered.

As you read “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” observe how Coleridge reworks the traditional ballad form and creates a poem of rare beauty and complexity.

READING STRATEGY: READING NARRATIVE POETRY

Like all ballads, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is a narrative poem—a poem that tells a story. It has many of the basic elements of a prose story: setting, characters, point of view, plot, conflict, and theme. As you read the poem, use a chart like the one shown to take notes about each of these elements. Focus on the main story, not on the frame story. Additionally, use the red marginal notes, which were written by Coleridge, to help you clarify plot developments.

| “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” |
| Setting (Time/Place): |
| Characters: |
| Point of View: |
| Plot and Major Conflict: |
| Theme: |

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

How can GUILT enslave us?

The famous expression “like an albatross around my neck” stems from Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” It is often used to describe feelings of guilt that weigh heavily on a person. Have you ever felt burdened by guilt?

QUICKWRITE Think about a time when you felt ashamed about something you had done. For example, maybe you lost your brother’s favorite CD or forgot your best friend’s birthday. How did guilt affect you? Write a paragraph to describe the situation.
THE RIME OF THE
Ancient Mariner
Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Argument
How a Ship, having first sailed to the Equator, was driven by storms to
the cold Country towards the South Pole; how the Ancient Mariner cruelly
and in contempt of the laws of hospitality killed a Seabird and how he was
followed by many strange Judgments; and in what manner he came back
to his own Country.

PART I
It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
“By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp’st thou me?

The Bridegroom’s doors are opened wide,
And I am next of kin;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May’st hear the merry din.”

He holds him with his skinny hand,
“There was a ship,” quoth he.
“Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!”
Eftsoons his hand dropped he.

He holds him with his glittering eye—
The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years’ child:
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

An ancient Mariner meeteth three
Gallants bidden to a wedding feast,
and detaineth one.

4 wherefore: why.

LITERARY BALLAD
Based on lines 5–8, identify the
length and rhyme scheme of a
traditional ballad stanza.

12 eftsoons: quickly.

The Wedding-Guest is spellbound by
the eye of the old seafaring man, and
constrained to hear his tale.

Analyze Visuals
Describe the mood conveyed
by this engraving. What details
contribute to this mood?

Engravings by Gustave F. Doré.
"The ship was cheered, the harbor cleared,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top.

The Sun came up upon the left,
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the sea.

Higher and higher every day,
Till over the mast at noon—"
The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,
For he heard the loud bassoon.

The bride hath paced into the hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes
The merry minstrelsy.

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

"And now the Storm-blast came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong:
He struck with his o’ertaking wings,
And chased us south along.

With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled.

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy cliffs
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

kirk: church.
The Mariner tells how the ship sailed southward with a good wind and fair weather, till it reached the Line.

over . . . noon: The ship has reached the equator, or "Line."
The Wedding-Guest heareth the bridal music; but the Mariner continueth his tale.

minstrelsy: group of musicians.
The ship driven by a storm toward the South Pole.

NARRATIVE POETRY
Compare the sailing conditions described in lines 21–28 and 41–50. In what way does the poem’s setting change?

The land of ice, and of fearful sounds where no living thing was to be seen.

cliffs: cliffs.

ken: perceive.
The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!

At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God’s name.

It ate the food it ne’er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steered us through!

And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariners’ hollo!

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
While all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white moonshine.”

60 swound: swoon; fainting fit.

Till a great sea bird, called the Albatross, came through the snow-fog, and was received with great joy and hospitality.

63 Albatross (āl’ba-trôs’): a large web-footed ocean bird common in the Southern Hemisphere.

And lo! the Albatross proveth a bird of good omen, and followeth the ship as it returned northward through fog and floating ice.

74 hollo (hä’lô): call.

75 shroud: one of the ropes that support a ship’s mast.

76 vespers nine: nine evenings.
“God save thee, ancient Mariner,
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—
Why look’st thou so?”—With my crossbow
I shot the Albatross.

PART II
The Sun now rose upon the right:
Out of the sea came he,
Still hid in mist, and on the left
Went down into the sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,
But no sweet bird did follow,
Nor any day for food or play
 Came to the mariners’ hollo!

And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work'em woe:
For all averred I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.

Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow!

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averred I had killed the bird
That brought the fog and mist.

’Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Down dropped the breeze, the sails dropped down,
’Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.
Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue, and white.

And some in dreams assured were
Of the Spirit that plagued us so;
Nine fathom deep he had followed us
From the land of mist and snow.

And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

PART III
There passed a weary time. Each throat
Was parched, and glazed each eye.

A weary time! a weary time!
How glazed each weary eye!
When, looking westward, I beheld
A something in the sky.
At first it seemed a little speck,
And then it seemed a mist;
It moved and moved, and took at last
A certain shape, I wist.

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
And still it neared and neared:
As if it dodged a water-sprite,
It plunged, and tacked and veered.

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
We could not laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,
And cried, A sail! a sail!

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
Agape they heard me call:
Gramercy! they for joy did grin,
And all at once their breath drew in,
As they were drinking all.

See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!
Hither to work us weal—
Without a breeze, without a tide,
She steadies with upright keel!

The western wave was all aflame,
The day was wellnigh done!
Almost upon the western wave
Rested the broad, bright Sun;
When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun.

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars
(Heaven's Mother send us grace!),
As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
With broad and burning face.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
How fast she nears and nears!
Are those her sails that glance in the Sun,
Like restless gossameres?

150 wist: perceived; discerned.
152 water sprite: a mythical being living in water.
155 tacked and veered: zigzagged.
156 At its nearer approach, it seemeth him to be a ship; and at a dear ransom he freeth his speech from the bonds of thirst.
160 gossameres: cobwebs floating in the air.
Are those her ribs through which the Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that Woman’s mate?

Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thickens man’s blood with cold.

The naked hulk alongside came,
And the twain were casting dice;
“The game is done! I’ve won! I’ve won!”
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

The Sun’s rim dips; the stars rush out:
At one stride comes the dark;
With far-heard whisper, o’er the sea,
Off shot the spectre-bark.

And its ribs are seen as bars on the face of the setting Sun. The Specter-Woman and her Deathmate, and no other on board the skeleton ship.

Like vessel, like crew!

192 leprosy (lēp’ra-sē): a disease marked by spreading patches of discoloration on the skin and by deformities of the limbs and other parts of the body.

Death and Life-in-Death have diced for the ship’s crew, and she (the latter) winneth the ancient Mariner.

No twilight within the courts of the Sun.

spectre-bark: ghost ship.
We listened and looked sideways up!
Fear at my heart, as at a cup,
My life-blood seemed to sip!
The stars were dim, and thick the night,
The steersman’s face by his lamp gleamed white;
From the sails the dew did drip—
Till clomb above the eastern bar
The hornéd Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip.

One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,
Too quick for groan or sigh,
Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,
And cursed me with his eye.

Four times fifty living men
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan),
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.

The souls did from their bodies fly—
They fled to bliss or woe!
And every soul, it passed me by
Like the whizz of my crossbow!

PART IV
“I fear thee, ancient Mariner!
I fear thy skinny hand!
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
As is the ribbed sea-sand.

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
And thy skinny hand so brown.”—
Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!
This body dropped not down.

Alone, alone, all, all alone
Alone on a wide, wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.
240 I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
245 But or ever a prayer had gushed,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust. "

I closed my lids, and kept them close,
And the balls like pulses beat;
250 But the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky,
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
Nor rot nor reek did they:
255 The look with which they looked on me
Had never passed away.

An orphan’s curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! more horrible than that
260 Is the curse in a dead man’s eye!
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
And yet I could not die.

The moving Moon went up the sky,
And nowhere did abide;
265 Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside—

Her beams bemocked the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship’s huge shadow lay,
270 The charméd water burnt alway
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
275 And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

And envieh that they should live, and
so many lie dead.

**NARRATIVE POETRY**
According to lines 244–247, what is the Mariner unable to
do? Explain what this suggests about his **character**.

249 balls: eyeballs.

But the curse liveth for him in the eye
of the dead men.

In his loneliness and fixedness he
yearneth towards the journeying
Moon, and the stars that still
sojourn, yet still move onward; and
everywhere the blue sky belongs to
them, and is their appointed rest,
and their native country and their
own natural homes, which they
enter unannounced, as lords that
are certainly expected and yet there
is a silent joy at their arrival.
267 bemocked . . . main: scornfully
defied the hot ocean (because the
moon’s pale light made the sea
appear cool).
268 hoar-frost: frozen dew.

By the light of the Moon he beholdeth
God’s creatures of the great calm.

276 fell off in hoary flakes: glittered
on water droplets falling from the
snakes.
Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

The selfsame moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

PART V
O sleep! it is a gentle thing,
Beloved from pole to pole!
To Mary Queen the praise be given!
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,
That slid into my soul.

The silly buckets on the deck,
That had so long remained,
I dreamt that they were filled with dew;
And when I awoke, it rained.

My lips were wet, my throat was cold.
My garments all were dank;
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,
And still my body drank.

I moved, and could not feel my limbs:
I was so light—almost
I thought that I had died in sleep,
And was a blesséd ghost.

And soon I heard a roaring wind:
It did not come anear;
But with its sound it shook the sails,
That were so thin and sere.

He heareth sounds and seeth strange sights and commotions in the sky and the element.

sere (sîr): dry.

By grace of the holy Mother, the ancient Mariner is refreshed with rain.

Language Coach

Synonyms  Words with the same or nearly the same meaning are synonyms. Which word in line 302 is a synonym for damp? What word in line 300 gives you a clue?
The upper air burst into life;
And a hundred fire-flags sheen;
To and fro they were hurried about!
And to and fro, and in and out,
The wan stars danced between.

And the coming wind did roar more loud,
And the sails did sigh like sedge;
And the rain poured down from one black cloud;
The Moon was at its edge.

The thick black cloud was cleft, and still
The Moon was at its side;
Like waters shot from some high crag,
The lightning fell with never a jag,
A river steep and wide.

The loud wind never reached the ship,
Yet now the ship moved on!
Beneath the lightning and the Moon
The dead men gave a groan.

They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;
It had been strange, even in a dream,
To have seen those dead men rise.

The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;
Yet never a breeze up-blew;
The mariners all 'gan work the ropes,
Where they were wont to do;
They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—
We were a ghastly crew.

The body of my brother's son
Stood by me, knee to knee:
The body and I pulled at one rope,
But he said naught to me.

“I fear thee, ancient Mariner!”
Be calm, thou Wedding-Guest:
’Twas not those souls that fled in pain,
Which to their corses came again,
But a troop of spirits blest:

314 fire-flags: probably the aurora australis, or southern lights—wavering bands of light in the night sky; sheen: bright.
317 wan: pale.
319 sedge: tall grasslike plants that make a rustling sound when blown by the wind.
338 wont: accustomed.

**NARRATIVE POETRY**

In a narrative, the climax is the moment of greatest interest and intensity. What shocking discovery does the Mariner make in lines 331–344?

But not by the souls of the men, nor by demons of earth or middle air, but by a blessed troop of angelic spirits, sent down by the invocation of the guardian saint.

348 corses: bodies.
For when it dawned—they dropped their arms,
   And clustered round the mast;
   Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,
   And from their bodies passed.

   Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
355   Then darted to the Sun;
   Slowly the sounds came back again,
   Now mixed, now one by one.

   Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
   I heard the skylark sing;
360   Sometimes all little birds that are,
   How they seemed to fill the sea and air
   With their sweet jargoning!

   And now ’twas like all instruments,
   Now like a lonely flute;
   And now it is an angel’s song,
   That makes the Heavens be mute.

362 jargoning: warbling.
It ceased; yet still the sails made on  
A pleasant noise till noon,  
A noise like of a hidden brook  
370 In the leafy month of June,  
That to the sleeping woods all night  
Singeth a quiet tune.

Till noon we quietly sailed on,  
Yet never a breeze did breathe:  
375 Slowly and smoothly went the ship,  
Moved onward from beneath.

Under the keel nine fathom deep,  
From the land of mist and snow,  
The Spirit slid: and it was he  
380 That made the ship to go.  
The sails at noon left off their tune,  
And the ship stood still also.

The Sun, right up above the mast,  
Had fixed her to the ocean:  
385 But in a minute she 'gan stir,  
With a short uneasy motion—  
Backwards and forwards half her length  
With a short uneasy motion.

Then like a pawing horse let go,  
390 She made a sudden bound:  
It flung the blood into my head,  
And I fell down in a swound.

How long in that same fit I lay,  
I have not to declare;  
395 But ere my living life returned,  
I heard, and in my soul discerned  
Two voices in the air.

“Is it he?” quoth one, “is this the man?  
By Him who died on cross,  
399 Him who died on cross: Jesus Christ.  
With his cruel bow he laid full low  
The harmless Albatross.

The Spirit who bideth by himself  
In the land of mist and snow,  
He loved the bird that loved the man  
400 Who shot him with his bow.”
The other was a softer voice,
As soft as honey-dew:
Quoth he, “The man hath penance done,
And penance more will do."

**PART VI**

*First Voice:*

“But tell me, tell me! speak again,
Thy soft response renewing—
What makes that ship drive on so fast?
What is the Ocean doing?”

*Second Voice:*

“Still as a slave before his lord,
The Ocean hath no blast;
His great bright eye most silently
Up to the Moon is cast—

If he may know which way to go;
For she guides him smooth or grim.

See, brother, see! how graciously
She looketh down on him.”

*First Voice:*

“But why drives on that ship so fast,
Without or wave or wind?”

*Second Voice:*

“The air is cut away before,
And closes from behind.

Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high!
Or we shall be belated:
For slow and slow that ship will go,
When the Mariner’s trance is abated.”

I woke, and we were sailing on
As in a gentle weather:
’Twas night, calm night, the Moon was high;
The dead men stood together.

All stood together on the deck,
For a charnel-dungeon fitter:
All fixed on me their stony eyes,
That in the Moon did glitter.
The pang, the curse, with which they died,
    Had never passed away:
440 I could not draw my eyes from theirs,
    Nor turn them up to pray.

And now this spell was snapped: once more
    I viewed the ocean green,
    And looked far forth, yet little saw
445 Of what had else been seen—

Like one that on a lonesome road
    Doth walk in fear and dread,
    And having once turned round, walks on,
    And turns no more his head;
450 Because he knows a frightful fiend
    Doth close behind him tread.

But soon there breathed a wind on me,
    Nor sound nor motion made:
    Its path was not upon the sea,
    In ripple or in shade.

455 It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
    Like a meadow-gale of spring—
    It mingled strangely with my fears,
    Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
    Yet she sailed softly too:
    Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—
    On me alone it blew.

460 O dream of joy! is this indeed
    The lighthouse top I see?
    Is this the hill? is this the kirk?
    Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o’er the harbor-bar,
    And I with sobs did pray—
470 O let me be awake, my God!
    Or let me sleep alway.

The harbor-bay was clear as glass,
    So smoothly it was strewn!
    And on the bay the moonlight lay,
    And the shadow of the Moon.
The rock shone bright, the kirk no less
That stands above the rock:
The moonlight steeped in silentness
The steady weathercock.

And the bay was white with silent light
Till rising from the same,
Full many shapes, that shadows were,
In crimson colors came.

A little distance from the prow
Those crimson shadows were:
I turned my eyes upon the deck—
O Christ! what saw I there!

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,
And, by the holy rood!
A man all light, a seraph-man,
On every corse there stood.

This seraph-band, each waved his hand:
It was a heavenly sight!
They stood as signals to the land,
Each one a lovely light;

This seraph-band, each waved his hand,
No voice did they impart—
No voice; but O, the silence sank
Like music on my heart.

But soon I heard the dash of oars,
I heard the Pilot’s cheer;
My head was turned perforce away,
And I saw a boat appear.

The Pilot and the Pilot’s boy,
I heard them coming fast:
Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy
The dead men could not blast.
I saw a third—I heard his voice:
It is the Hermit good!
He singeth loud his godly hymns
That he makes in the wood.
He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away
The Albatross's blood.

PART VII
This hermit good lives in that wood
Which slopes down to the sea.
How loudly his sweet voice he rears!
He loves to talk with marineres
That come from a far countree.

He kneels at morn, and noon, and eve—
He hath a cushion plump.
It is the moss that wholly hides
The rotted old oak-stump.

The skiff-boat neared: I heard them talk,
"Why, this is strange, I trow!
Where are those lights so many and fair,
That signal made but now?"

"Strange, by my faith!" the Hermit said—
"And they answered not our cheer!
The planks look warped! and see those sails,
How thin they are and sere!
I never saw aught like to them,
Unless perchance it were
Brown skeletons of leaves that lag
My forest-brook along;
When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,
And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,
That cats the she-wolf's young."

"Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look—
(The Pilot made reply)
I am a-fear'd."—"Push on, push on!"
Said the Hermit cheerily.
The boat came closer to the ship,
But I nor spake nor stirred;
The boat came close beneath the ship,
And straight a sound was heard.

Under the water it rumbled on
Still louder and more dread:
It reached the ship, it split the bay;
The ship went down like lead.

Stunned by that loud and dreadful sound,
Which sky and ocean smote,
Like one that hath been seven days drowned
My body lay afloat;
But swift as dreams, myself I found
Within the Pilot's boat.

Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,
The boat spun round and round;
And all was still, save that the hill
Was telling of the sound.

The ship suddenly sinketh.

The ancient Mariner is saved in the Pilot's boat.

559 telling of: echoing.
I moved my lips—the Pilot shrieked
And fell down in a fit;
The holy Hermit raised his eyes,
And prayed where he did sit.

I took the oars: the Pilot’s boy,
Who now doth crazy go,
Laughed loud and long, and all the while
His eyes went to and fro.
“Ha! ha!” quoth he, “full plain I see
The Devil knows how to row.”

And now, all in my own countree,
I stood on the firm land!
The Hermit stepped forth from the boat,
And scarcely he could stand.

“O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!”
The Hermit crossed his brow.
“Say quick,” quoth he, “I bid thee say—
What manner of man art thou?”

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With a woeful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach.

What loud uproar bursts from that door!
The wedding-guests are there:
But in the garden-bower the bride
And bride-maids singing are:
And hark, the little vesper bell,
Which biddeth me to prayer!

LITERARY BALLAD
Identify several examples of archaic language in lines 564–573. What effect do these antiquated expressions help to create?

575 crossed his brow: made the sign of the cross on his forehead.

The ancient Mariner earnestly entreateth the Hermit to shrieve him; and the penance of life falls on him.

And ever and anon throughout his future life an agony constraineth him to travel from land to land;
O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide, wide sea:
So lonely 'twas, that God Himself
Scarce seeméd there to be.

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,
'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company!—

To walk together to the kirk,
And all together pray,
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And youths and maidens gay!

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar,
Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest
Turned from the bridegroom's door.

He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man
He rose the morrow morn.
After Reading

Comprehension

1. **Recall** In what ways does the albatross’s arrival seem to affect the ship’s voyage?

2. **Summarize** What happens to the rest of the crew after the Mariner kills the albatross?

3. **Clarify** Why does the albatross eventually fall from the Mariner’s neck?

4. **Clarify** Why must the Mariner continue to tell his tale?

Text Analysis

5. **Understand Narrative Poetry** Like short stories and novels, narrative poems often focus on characters who undergo major changes. Identify the character traits the Mariner exhibits early on in the poem. In what ways does he grow and change as the plot unfolds? Review the chart you created as you read to help you respond.

6. **Make Inferences** What are the consequences of the Mariner’s being won by Life-in-Death (lines 190–198) rather than by Death?

7. **Identify Symbol** In literature, a symbol is a person, place, object, or activity that represents something beyond itself. What symbolic meaning might the albatross have in the poem? Cite evidence to support your answer.

8. **Make Judgments** Do you think that the punishment the Mariner experiences fits his crime? Explain your thoughts.

9. **Interpret Theme** What overall message, or theme, about guilt does the poem convey? Offer evidence to support your ideas.

10. **Analyze Literary Ballad** Review the conventions of the ballad form listed on page 217. Identify the characteristics of the traditional ballad that are present in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” What qualities distinguish this poem from traditional ballads? Give examples to support your observations.

Text Criticism

11. **Critical Interpretations** Decades after the publication of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” Coleridge observed that it had “too much” of a moral for a work of “pure imagination.” Do you agree or disagree with this view? Cite evidence from the poem to support your opinion.

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**How can GUILT enslave us?**

Guilt is a feeling of self-reproach and self-condemnation that can dominate our thoughts. What are some ways people try to escape from guilt?