

The Little Black Boy

By
William Blake

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DDE

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Introduction

The presentation illustrates William Blake's poem 'The Little Black Boy', prescribed for your study in the text entitled *Chronicles of Time*. The poem was inspired by the poet's concern for the contemporary racial discrimination and lists among poems in *Songs of Innocence*. Some other poems of this collection are 'The Shepherd', 'On Another's Sorrow', 'The Divine Image', 'Holy Thursday', 'A Cradle Song'. *Songs of Experience* (1794) followed *Songs of Innocence*. His poems make a simple reading and unfold the power of his vision.


Objectives

After going through this presentation you will be able to:


- understand the text of the poem.
- appreciate and grasp the explanation of the poem given in lesson No. 24, B.A.-I English.
- learn more about Blake's Writings.



About the poet

- William Blake (1757-1827) was born in London on 28th September to a hosier.
 - An engraver, painter, mystic and poet Blake received no formal education.
 - At the age of four he claimed to have seen God looking at him through his windows and at eight he saw visions of angels in the fields.
 - Blake questioned the accepted values of his time and exposed the inhumanity and cruelty under the surface of civilization, convention and religion.
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About the poem

- The poem was inspired by the poet's concern for black races.
 - It voices the little black boy's self-hatred. On account of having been denied whiteness he feels deprived of God's light.
 - The poem can be roughly divided into three parts – The little boy's agony, his mother's effort to lessen the pain and the heightened awareness of the black child.
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Paraphrase : **Stanza - 1**

- The little black boy was born in the southern wild. He says that his body is black but his soul is white.
- The boy tries to convince himself that the whiteness (the purity) of his soul compensates for the blackness of his body.

Stanza - 2

- The boy's mother takes him on her lap and teaches him, reassures him by offering consoling vision.
- Pointing towards the Sun she directs him to look at the abode of God.


Stanza - 3

- She explains that it is His light and warmth that we received through the Sun.
- The mother says that flowers, trees, human beings and animals – all receive the light of the Sun alike. Everyone enjoys the bliss of God.

Stanza - 4

- The mother explains that they (the blacks) are so placed as to learn to receive God's love in the next life.
- She pacifies the boy saying that their black bodies and sunburnt faces like a cloud veil the body in order to shield this body (grove) from the scorching heat.

Stanza - 5

- The mother goes on to reassure her son by telling him that once they absorb the beams of God's love, the cloud i.e. this body will vanish.
 - Once released from this outer garment - his black body, the boy will have God's invitation to enjoy His love and care.
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Stanza - 6

- The black boy nurtures a hope for the union. He tells the white child that once they leave this body they will be united in heaven.

Stanza - 7

- The black boy proposes to shade the white boy from the heat. He will lovingly caress his silver hair. He believes that finally both of them will be free from the colour prejudice and the white boy will also love him.



Vocabulary

bereaved : deprived of; *beams of love*: rays arousing fellow-feeling; *sunburnt face* : face rendered black by the heat of the Sun; *grove* : a cluster of trees; *rejoice* : to make merry; *stroke* : to caress; *vanish* : to stop existing.



Exercise

Write short answers to the following:

- Where was the little black boy born?
- What did the mother of the black boy tell him?
- Write a short note on the imagery of the poem.

Write an essay type answer:

Critically examine the development of the thought, in the poem 'The Little Black Boy'.

