

Vachel Lindsay

ASSOCIATION

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A NET TO SNARE THE MOONLIGHT A TEACHER'S GUIDE

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Page 1: The Moon is a Book

1. In the first stanza of this poem, the speaker suggests the moon is a book that can be understood by birds and by the “tiniest” children. Do you think birds and moonbeams frequently share stories? Why or why not?
2. The speaker in this poem says that the stories are “Too delicate for day-light-time.” Why is the evening an ideal time for the moon’s fairy-tales to be shared? Why is nighttime a great setting for storytelling?
3. This poem suggests that fairy-tales are both old and new. Do you think old stories can be made new – why or why not? Are there other ways stories can be shared (beyond reading from a book)?
4. The poem closes stating: New leaves keep turning all the year, / New fairy-tales unfold. Write the next fairy-tale that can be added to the moon’s book. Be sure your fairy-tale can be told in the evening, like the poem instructs.

Page 3: The Dandelion

1. This poem describes a dandelion as the king of the village flowers. According to this poem, who or what removes the Dandelion King from his throne? How does the King fight back?
2. What has happened in the last two lines of this poem: By noon you raise a sea of stars / More golden than before. Have you seen dandelions act this way in your own yard?
3. Many people think of dandelions as weeds that they want to remove from their yards, but this poem treats the dandelion as a king. Why do you think Vachel Lindsay views the dandelion positively when so many people view it negatively?
4. Pick an object that many people do not like and write a short poem describing the good features that it has. Does it have an enemy? If so, how does it overcome its enemy?

Page 5: On the Garden-wall

1. In a royal court, pages were young people who waited on someone of high rank, like a king or queen. But pages are also what we write on and read from. The speaker in the poem describes pages as “Two giant, friendly birds.” Why do you think Vachel Lindsay described pages as birds? Is it possible to read the “pages” in this poem using both definitions?
2. Do you think writing can take you places, as if on the wings of a bird? Why or why not?
3. At the end of the poem, the speaker describes being lifted into space where he eventually finds himself looking down on the moon. It is described as a flower. Do you think the moon can look like a flower? Why or why not?
4. In this poem, the speaker describes a beautiful landscape with white sand and orange trees surrounded by a white marble wall. Write your own dream poem. Are there any dreams that you have had with such vivid images in them? How might you describe one of your most memorable dreams, using every sense – all you saw, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled?

Page 7: Parvenu

1. *Parvenu* is a French word that means someone who has recently become wealthy or powerful but does not yet have the manners and habits of someone who has always had wealth or power. A parvenu is an upstart. How does knowing what the title of this poem means help you understand the poem better?
2. Vachel Lindsay gives us a new perspective of the Cinderella fairytale by imagining how Cinderella feels after she has married her prince and become a princess. How does she feel in this poem? What words does Lindsay use to help us know Cinderella’s emotions?
3. The final line of “Parvenu” changes point of view to “we” – who is the “we” of the poem, and what does the “we” long for? How is this different from what Cinderella longs for?
4. Write a poem about an upstart that you know or have read about – someone who is highly successful at something but who comes from an unexpected background. How does this person feel about their success? Do they miss anything about their childhood?

Page 9: What the Scarecrow Said

1. This poem is written in the first person point of view of a scarecrow, which lets readers see exactly what this scarecrow thinks. Why do you think Vachel Lindsay wanted us to get inside the mind of something as simple as a scarecrow?
2. Why does the scarecrow think that it is a king? How would you describe his kingdom and his subjects?
3. What sorts of gifts and treasures does a scarecrow possess? Are they gifts that you would consider precious? Why or why not?

4. Pick an everyday object that most people don't think about that much, and write a poem from that object's point of view. Does this object think it is important, like the scarecrow, or unimportant? Does this object have precious items or not?

Page 11: The Dangerous Little Boy Fairies

1. Why are the little boy fairies dangerous? What actions do they take based on the words used in the poem? Would you like to meet these little boy fairies?
2. The poem describes a fly as "gauze-winged." What do you think that means? How does the description of the fly contrast to the way the speaker in the poem describes the fairies? Do you think this difference is important?
3. Another portion of the poem describes how the boys would often "rather fight than eat their meals." Are there any activities you would rather do than eat your lunch or dinner?
4. Imagine what an entire day would be like for one of "The Dangerous Little Boy Fairies." Write a poem that gives a daily schedule or agenda for one of fairies. Consider what activities would fill his morning, afternoon, and evening, and make each line or couplet describe one of those activities. Try to make a picture out of each activity, using all your senses.

Page 13: What the Rattlesnake Said

1. According to its title, this poem is told from the point of view of a rattlesnake. He thinks that both the sun and the moon are afraid of him. What specific reasons does the rattlesnake give for the sun and moon to fear him?
2. The rattlesnake also thinks "every other thing" is scared of him. Do you think that it's true that everything is scared of the rattlesnake? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think the rattlesnake describes the moon as a prairie-dog and the sun as a broncho? How are the moon and the sun like these animals? Do you think there are other animals whose actions better describe the moon and the sun?
4. Write a poem from the perspective of the sun or the moon talking back to the rattlesnake. How would the sun or the moon explain itself to the rattlesnake? Are they actually afraid, or has the rattlesnake misunderstood them?

Page 15: What the Hyena Said

1. This poem imagines the moon as a skull with moon-worms circling her forehead and living in her eyes. Think about the times you have looked at a full moon. Do you think a full moon can look like a skull? Why or why not?
2. The title of this poem tells us readers that a hyena is the speaker in this poem, which means that the description of the moon in this poem comes from a hyena. Why do you think a hyena might see worms and death in the moon?

3. This poem is spooky and sad, mostly because of what the moon-worms do and see in each stanza. What are the moon-worms doing in each stanza? What words seem the most spooky or sad to you, and why?
4. Try writing a spooky poem by taking on the point of view of an animal or character that someone might find scary. Have your speaker describe the moon in your poem. How might your speaker see the moon differently than you? Try to use your senses – sight, scent, touch, taste, sound.

Page 17: The Spider and the Ghost of the Fly

1. This poem is told from the point of view of a fly that was in love with a spider. Do you think it's possible for a fly to actually love a spider? Why would Vachel Lindsay write a poem about these two creatures being in love?
2. Throughout the poem the fly describes several awful things that the spider did to him. Do all of these things seem like normal things a spider would do, or do you think the spider is trying to be mean to the fly?
3. This poem is sad because of what the spider does to the fly. The last line in particular is sad because we associate the heart with love. However, the fly does get to come back as a ghost to haunt the spider. Do you think this helps cure the sadness he felt?
4. Write a love poem about two different animals from the perspective of one of the animals. Is their love a happy love or a sad love? Use happy or sad word choices to create the sort of mood and tone you want.

Page 19: Crickets On A Strike

1. The queen of fairyland is described as foolish – what does the queen do in the poem that might be considered foolish? Do you think this description is fitting? Why or why not?
2. What time of year do dew drops fall? Why do you think the crickets chose the narrator's kitchen floor as their new home instead of being outside with the queen?
3. The word “malcontent” means to be dissatisfied with existing conditions or circumstances, including forms of government. How does knowing this word help you better understand the viewpoint of the crickets?
4. Imagine you are a cricket sitting on your kitchen floor and write a poem from that perspective. What does your kitchen look like from the floor? How does the kitchen smell and feel differently than the outdoors? What sounds from the kitchen might inspire you to make music?

Page 21: What Grandpa Mouse Said

1. In this poem, the moon's owls are portrayed as scary – what words does Vachel Lindsay use to give us this impression? Why do you think the owl is scary to the narrator of this poem, Grandpa Mouse?

2. Who is Grandpa Mouse speaking to in this poem? Why is he providing a warning about the moon's owls?
3. What would Grandpa Mouse like his audience to do for the owl-queen (the moon), and what does he think the owl-queen will do if his advice is followed? What response do you think the owl-queen would have to the gifts provided by the mice – do you think Grandpa Mouse is right?
4. Imagine you are a small animal. What other animals might scare you or cause you concern? What advice would you give your fellow small animals to avoid danger? Write a poem with 4 stanzas from the point of view of your animal and explain how you can avoid dangerous encounters with larger predators.

Page 23: A Dirge for a Righteous Kitten

1. This sad poem is a list of the many good things a kitten did before his death. Vachel Lindsay wrote this dirge, which is a poem or song of mourning, as a way to remember the kitten and deal with the sadness of losing this sweet animal. Do you think that writing poetry can be a good way to deal with sadness? Why or why not?
2. The word “righteous” means good and filled with virtue. What other things could a cat do that would make him or her righteous, besides what is listed in the poem? What might a cat do that is not righteous?
3. Have you ever had a pet that did any of the good things described in the poem? Were any of the traits listed in the poem surprising to you? Which ones, and why?
4. Write a list poem about a pet – real or imagined. Make your pet very good, very bad, or somewhere in between. Try to use a similar form as Vachel Lindsay, starting many of your lines with “he” (or she) followed by a specific action – “he stole,” “he freed,” “he wore.”

Page 25: Ghosts in Love

1. The first stanza of this poem is a question – and a strange one at that. It asks us readers to imagine ghosts wanting to get married! According to the poem, where do ghosts find bridal veils? Can you think of other places that a ghost might be able to find a bridal veil?
2. The second stanza of this poem includes new characters – a “you” and an “I” – who are not ghosts. In fact, the “you” and “I” are the speakers in this poem. Given the odd conversation these two characters are having, what sort of people do you think they are? How well do they know each other? Who do you have weird conversations with?
3. Vachel Lindsay capitalizes four words: Mystery, Wails, Fantasy, and Memory. Are these words alike in any way? Are these words different than the others used by Lindsay in the rest of the poem? What sorts of reasons might a poet have for capitalizing words that usually would not be capitalized?

4. Ask and answer a very strange question in a two-stanza poem. Before you start writing, imagine your two speakers – who are they, and how are their voices different from each other? Your question can be as long or short as you want, but remember that it needs to be in quotation marks. The same is true of your answer, whether it makes sense or is entirely too weird to be believed.

Page 27: Drying their Wings (What the Carpenter Said)

1. The first line of this poem is a metaphor: the moon's a cottage with a door. The rest of the poem describes this cottage in more detail. What is inside this cottage? What is outside this cottage?
2. Look at the title of the poem. Why might a carpenter view the moon as a cottage with a door? What does a cottage provide to both humans and "urchins of the sky"?
3. Consider the words that Vachel Lindsay uses to describe the cottage. Are these words more positive or more negative? Do the poet's word choices help us understand what the poem's main point might be?
4. Pick an occupation, and then write a poem about the moon as if you had that job. Your first line should be a metaphor that compares the moon to your chosen job – like the carpenter sees a cottage that she or he may have built. Then use the rest of the poem to describe your comparison with a lot more detail, using all five of your senses.

Page 29: The Flower of Mending

1. In the poem, Vachel Lindsay refers to the dragonfly, snail, moths, and mouse as "pretty creatures." Why do you think these creatures are described in this way? What kinds of animals do you think are "pretty?"
2. The second and third stanzas describe the Flower of Mending. What details from this section of the poem help explain what the Flower is doing? How is the Flower helping the creatures seeking its assistance?
3. At the end of the poem, the speaker directly addresses the reader by saying "You" and "Your." Who do you think the speaker wants to hear these words? Why do you think the poem ends this way?
4. Write a letter in the form of a poem – an epistle poem – to someone in your life who helped you to mend or fix something. How did his or her actions help you feel better or help you take something that was broken and give it new life? Explain why his or her assistance was meaningful to you.

Page 31: A Net to Snare the Moonlight

1. The first stanza of this poem states that things from nature such as dew, rain, and moonlight are all joyful for people. Which parts of nature give you the most joy? Why?

2. The focus of the first two stanzas is on all of mankind, but the focus in the last two stanzas shifts specifically to “each poor man.” What would the speaker of the poem make sure every poor person had? Why might it be difficult for people without a lot of money to have “a peaceful place at evening”?
3. This poem suggests that we should make sure every person has land, grass, or fields so that they can enjoy the gifts that come from nature. Why is it important for us readers to not only enjoy nature ourselves, but to also make sure that other people can enjoy it? What can we do to make sure this happens?
4. Write a poem about a memory you have of exploring nature. What did you see? How did it make you feel? Think about what aspects of your experience you would want to share with another person, and use all of your senses to create vivid images for your readers.

**Page 33: The Candle Moon
(What the Shepherd Dog Said)**

1. This poem has a lot of comparisons. Can you figure out what the moon is compared to? The night sky? The Earth? Why do you think Vachel Lindsay used so many metaphors in this poem?
2. The children’s room contains unexpected and expected things – what is inside the room? Are readers supposed to think that all of these items are literal – truly and factually there – or are some items figurative – representing something else like in personification or metaphor?
3. Do you think this poem is similar to a lullaby? Why or why not? What favorite lullabies do you remember from when you were little?
4. Write your own lullaby poem, something that would help comfort someone who is trying to go to sleep. Think about literal things in your own bedroom that are comforting. Think about other objects – from school or nature – that give you comfort. For an added challenge, try to make one of your items figurative by personifying it or including it in a metaphor or simile.