

Year 7

Nature poetry

Term 5

Week beginning 20th April 2020

Week ending 1st May 2020

Glossary

alliteration	Where words that are close together start with the same sound , e.g. “flowing fl akes that fl ock”.
ambiguity	Where a word or phrase has two or more possible interpretations .
assonance	When words share the same vowel sound but their consonants are different, e.g. “might fly our lives like paper kites”.
autobiographical	Describing something that happened in the poet’s life .
blank verse	Poetry written in iambic pentameter that doesn’t rhyme .
caesura (plural <i>caesurae</i>)	A pause in a line of poetry. E.g. around the full stop in “Maps too. The sun shines through”.
chronological	When events are arranged in the order in which they happened .
colloquial	Sounding like everyday spoken language, e.g. “One of my mates goes by”.
consonance	Repetition of a consonant sound in nearby words, e.g. “num b as a sm ashed arm”.
dialect	A variation of a language spoken by people from a particular place or background . Dialects might include different words or sentence constructions, e.g. “what happen to de Caribs”.
dramatic monologue	A form of poetry that uses the assumed voice of a single speaker who is not the poet to address an implied audience , e.g. ‘My Last Duchess’.
emotive	Something that makes you feel a particular emotion .
empathy	When someone understands what someone else is experiencing and how they feel about it.
end-stopping	Finishing a line of poetry with the end of a phrase or sentence .
enjambment	When a sentence or phrase runs over from one line or stanza to the next .
euphemism	An indirect word or phrase used instead of something upsetting or offensive , or to conceal meaning . E.g. the narrator of ‘My Last Duchess’ says “all smiles stopped” to avoid saying that his wife died.
first person	When a poet writes about themselves or their group, using words like “ I ”, “ my ”, “ we ” and “ our ”.
form	The type of poem, e.g. a sonnet or a ballad, and its features , like number of lines, rhyme and rhythm.
free verse	Poetry that doesn’t rhyme and has no regular rhythm or line length .
half-rhymes	Words that have a similar , but not identical, end sound . E.g. “crisp” and “grasp”.
homonyms	Words that are spelt and pronounced the same, but have different meanings , e.g. “tissue”.
iambic pentameter	Poetry with a metre of ten syllables — five of them stressed, and five unstressed. The stress falls on every second syllable , e.g. “That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall ”.
iambic tetrameter	Like iambic pentameter but with a metre of eight syllables — four stressed and four unstressed. E.g. “But most through midnight streets I hear ”.
imagery	Language that creates a picture in your mind . It includes metaphors , similes and personification .
<i>in medias res</i>	When a narrative starts in the middle of the action , e.g. ‘Bayonet Charge’.
internal rhyme	When two or more words in the same line rhyme, e.g. “ tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers ”.
irony	When words are used to imply the opposite of what they normally mean. It can also mean when there is a difference between what people expect and what actually happens .
juxtaposition	When a poet puts two ideas, events, characters or descriptions close to each other to encourage the reader to contrast them. E.g. Agard juxtaposes figures from British and Caribbean history.
language	The choice of words used. Different kinds of language have different effects .
layout	The way a piece of poetry is visually presented to the reader, e.g. line length, how the poem is broken up into different stanzas, whether lines create some kind of visual pattern.

Glossary

metaphor	A way of describing something by saying that it is something else , e.g. “the loose silver of whitebait”.
metre	The arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables to create rhythm in a line of poetry.
monologue	One person speaking for a long period of time.
mood	The feel or atmosphere of a poem, e.g. humorous, threatening, eerie.
narrative	Writing that tells a story , e.g. ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’.
narrator	The person speaking the words. E.g. the narrator of ‘Poppies’ is a mother whose son has gone to war.
onomatopoeia	A word that sounds like the thing it’s describing, e.g. “rumbles” and “jingle” in ‘Exposure’.
oral poetry	Poetry that is intended to be spoken aloud , rather than read.
oxymoron	A phrase which appears to contradict itself, e.g. “marriage hearse”.
personification	Describing a non-living thing as if it has human qualities and feelings , or behaves in a human way, e.g. “My city hides behind me.”
Petrarchan sonnet	A form of sonnet in which the first eight lines have a regular ABBA rhyme scheme and introduce a problem, while the final six lines have a different rhyme scheme and solve the problem.
phonetic spellings	When words are spelt as they sound rather than with their usual spelling, e.g. “dem” instead of “them”. It’s often used to show that someone is speaking with a certain accent or dialect .
plosive	A short burst of sound made when you say a word containing the letters b, d, g, k, p or t.
rhetoric	Language used by the poet to persuade you of a particular view.
rhetorical question	A question that doesn’t need an answer, but is asked to make or emphasise a point.
rhyme scheme	A pattern of rhyming words in a poem. E.g. ‘London’ has an ABAB rhyme scheme — this means that the first and third lines in each stanza rhyme, and so do the second and fourth lines.
rhyming couplet	A pair of rhyming lines that are next to each other, e.g. the last two lines of ‘War Photographer’.
rhyming triplet	Three rhyming lines that are next to each other, e.g. lines 13-15 of ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’.
rhythm	A pattern of sounds created by the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables.
sibilance	Repetition of ‘s’ and ‘sh’ sounds, e.g. “ s entries wh isper, c urious, n ervous”.
simile	A way of describing something by comparing it to something else, usually by using the words “like” or “as”, e.g. “the world overflowing / like a treasure chest”.
sonnet	A form of poem with fourteen lines , that usually follows a clear rhyme scheme .
stanza	A group of lines in a poem.
structure	The order and arrangement of ideas and events in a poem, e.g. how it begins, develops and ends.
syllable	A single unit of sound within a word. E.g. “all” has one syllable, “always” has two.
symbolism	When an object stands for something else . E.g. the statue of Ozymandias symbolises human power, and the dove in ‘Poppies’ symbolises mourning.
syntax	The arrangement of words in a sentence or phrase so that they make sense.
third person	When a poet writes about a character who isn’t the speaker, using words like “he” or “she” .
tone	The mood or feelings suggested by the way the narrator writes , e.g. confident, thoughtful.
voice	The characteristics of the person narrating the poem. Poems are usually written either using the poet’s voice, as if they’re speaking to you directly , or the voice of a character .
volta	A turning point in a poem, when the argument or tone changes dramatically .

TITLE
INTRODUCTION The poem _____ is about _____ . The themes that are revealed most strongly are _____ and _____ . In this essay I will analyse how....
SECTION ONE: STRUCTURE The poem is written in the form of.... This suggests that It helps to show that.... Furthermore, the writer uses This helps to convey a sense of.... It helps the reader to imagine that In addition the writer also uses.... This reveals.... For example....
SECTION TWO: LANGUAGE The writer uses words such as This conveys a theme of... It suggests... It helps us to understand that... Perhaps the writer did this to...
SECTION THREE: LANGUAGE The writer uses the method of _____ to help emphasise the theme of _____ For example: '....' This might suggest... It could also symbolise... The word _____ is effective because...
CONCLUSION: Overall, the reader is left feeling that....
QUOTATIONS YOU COULD USE:

otter

otter

- O**tter enters river without falter – what a supple slider out of holt and into water!
- T**his shape-shifter's a sheer breath-taker, a sure heart-stopper – but you'll only ever spot a shadow-flutter, bubble-skein, and never (almost never) actual otter.
- T**his swift swimmer's a silver-miner – with trout its ore it bores each black pool deep and deeper, delves up-current steep and steeper, turns the water inside-out, then inside-outer.
- E**ver dreamed of being otter? That utter underwater thunderbolter, that shimmering twister?
- R**un to the riverbank, otter-dreamer, slip your skin and change your matter, pour your outer being into otter – and enter now as otter without falter into water.

newt

newt

'Newt, oh newt, you are too cute!'

Emoted the coot to the too-cute newt,

'With your frilly back and your shiny suit
and your spotted skin so unhirsute!'

'Too cute?!' roared the newt to the
unastute coot. 'With all this careless
talk of cute you bring me into
disrepute, for newts aren't cute:
we're kings of the pond, lions of the
duckweed, dragons of the water;
albeit, it's true,' – he paused – 'minute.'

willow

willow

Willow, when the wind blows so your branches billow,
O will you whisper while we listen so we learn what
words your long leaves loosen?

If you whisper when the wind blows so your branches
billow, willow, we will listen for a day, a week, a year,
till we know what willows say, what willows speak.

Lean in, listeners, come below our leaves and wait until
the wind blows so our branches billow, listen for a year,
a week, a day, but you will *never* hear what willows speak,
what willows say.

Long you linger, listeners, hard you press your ears against
our bark, but you will *never* sense our sap, and you will
never speak in leaves, or put down roots into the rot –
for we are willow and you are not.

O open up your heartwood to us will you, willow, show
your deep within, your rough without, your water-
brushing bough, your shoot, your grain, your knot?

We will never whisper to you, listeners, nor speak, nor shout,
and even if you learn to utter alder, elder, poplar, aspen,
you will *never* know a word of willow – for we are willow
and you are not.

WILLOW STORY

ONCE THERE WAS AN ANCIENT WILLOW TREE who lived besides a burn. There she had stood for many Moons, her gnarled trunk rising up from the marshy bank, branches dipping into the cool peaty waters. On a moonlit night you might mistake her for an old hen wife as she bent over to fetch water and moonbeams for her lotions and potions as the Spring tides gathered.

Today was the Spring Equinox and the old tree recalled her sisters who had stood besides her whispering and weaving their song with the flowing sweet music of the burn. Gone were they and she was the only one remaining. No longer did the humans come to cut her supple boughs and sit weaving their bonnie baskets to hawk at the markets. And she sighed sadly as the mists gathered around her and night birds called to the rising moon.

Up on the hill was a croft. A young lassie awoke and pulled her plaid around her shoulders and quietly walked out into the night. And as she stood there bathing in the light of the moon, what did she see but a flash of white leaping along that golden path



March



- a white mountain Hare - and found her feet following in its tracks.

The path led down to the burn where promises of primroses and cowslips slept in the mossy banks. As the mists swirled around her feet, she thought she heard the whispering of a song in the breath of the night air and the nearer she came to the water's edge the stronger the song:

*Hare, Moon,
Willow and Water,
Weave your magic,
Bring back the Light.*

And there the Hare stood in the roots of old Willow, ears and nose twitching scenting sensing the lassie. Then taking a sip of water from the burn it leapt over stones and heather, disappearing into the black cloak of night.

Sleep was touching the girls eyelids, and resting in the Willow's arms she fell asleep. And in her dream there she saw an old woman whose face was as round as the Moon itself and heard a voice as clear as the sparkling water:

*Remember this night
And the gifts I hold.*

The warm Spring sun awoke as did the girl but not in the arms of old Grandmother Willow. Clutching to her fading dream and springing out of bed she ran out into the fresh morning air down towards the burn searching this way and that for signs of the magical Hare.

And there under the boughs of the tree she saw in the wet earth tiny paw prints and she promised from that day on to take care of that old tree.

Seasons passed and one warm spring evening an old woman stretched her bent back from her work. She looked down to the ancient Willow tree that for years had supplied her with the supple branches she needed for her creels and baskets, and whose bark eased the pain in her old bones. And surrounding Willow's skirts were her offspring dancing to the old one's whispering soft lullaby. And the old woman thought she caught a flash of white leaping and springing across

the burn, and she smiled as her old gnarled hands went back to the weaving, leaving her mind free to dream a while longer:

*Can you no hush yer weeping
All the wee lambs are sleepin',
Birdies are nestling,
Nestling the gither.
Dream Angus is hirplin*

*O'er the heather.
Dreams to sell
Fine dreams to sell,
Angus is here
With dreams to sell.
Hush a bye baby
Sleep without fear,
Dream Angus has brought
You a dream my dear.*



Spirit of the Willow Tree

About one thousand years ago (but according to the dates of the story 744 years ago) the temple of "San-jn-san-gen Do" was founded. That was in 1132. 'San-ju-san-gen Do" means hall of thirty-three spaces; and there are said to be over 33,333 figures of the Goddess Kwannon, the Goddess of Mercy, in the temple to-day. Before the temple was built, in a village near by stood a willow tree of great size. It marked the playing-ground of all the village children, who swung on its branches, and climbed on its limbs. It afforded shade to the aged in the heat of summer, and in the evenings, when work was done, many were the village lads and lasses who vowed eternal love under its branches. The tree seemed an influence for good to all. Even the weary traveler could sleep peacefully and almost dry under its branches. Alas, even in those times men were often ruthless with regard to trees. One day the villagers announced an intention to cut it down and use it to build a bridge across the river.

There lived in the village a young farmer named Heitaro, a great favorite, who had lived near the old tree all his days, as his forefathers had done ; and he was greatly against cutting it down.

Such a tree should be respected, thought he. Had it not braved the storms of hundreds of years ? In the heat of summer what pleasure it afforded the children ! Did it not give to the weary shelter, and to the love-smitten a sense of romance ? All these thoughts Heitaro impressed upon the villagers. Sooner than approve your cutting it down/ he said, "I will give you as many of my own trees as you require to build the bridge. You must leave this dear old willow alone for ever/

The villagers readily agreed. They also had a secret veneration for the old tree.

Heitaro was delighted, and readily found wood with which to build the bridge.

Some days later Heitaro, returning from his work, found standing by the willow a beautiful girl.

Instinctively he bowed to her. She returned the bow. They spoke together of the tree, its age and beauty. They seemed, in fact, to be drawn towards each other by a common sympathy. Heitaro was sorry when she said that she must be going, and bade him good-day. That evening his mind was far from being fixed on the ordinary things of life. "Who was the lady under the willow tree ? How I wish I could see her again!" "thought he. There was no sleep for Heitaro that night. He had caught the fever of love.

Next day he was at his work early ; and he remained at it all day, working doubly hard, so as to try and forget the lady of the willow tree ; but on his way home in the

evening, behold, there was the lady again ! This time she came forward to greet him in the most friendly way.

“Welcome, good friend !”she said. “Come and rest under the branches of the willow you love so well, for you must be tired.”

Heitaro readily accepted this invitation, and not only did he rest, but also he declared his love.

Day by day after this the mysterious girl (whom no others had seen) used to meet Heitaro, and at last she promised to marry him if he asked no questions as to her parents or friends. “I have none,” she said. “I can only promise to be a good and faithful wife, and tell you that I love you with all my heart and soul. Call me, then, ” Higo,” J and I will be your wife.”

Next day Heitaro took Higo to his house, and they were married. A son was born to them in a little less than a year, and became their absorbing joy. There was not a moment of their spare time in which either Heitaro or his wife was not playing with the child, whom they called Chiyodo. It is doubtful if a more happy home could have been found in all Japan than the house of Heitaro, with his good wife Higo and their beautiful child.

Alas, where in this world has complete happiness ever been known to last ? Even did the gods permit this, the laws of man would not.

When Chiyodo had reached the age of five years— the most beautiful boy in the neighbourhood—the ex-Emperor Toba decided to build in Kyoto an immense temple to Kwannon. He would contribute 1001 images of the Goddess of Mercy.

The ex-Emperor Toba’s wish having become known, orders were given by the authorities to collect timber for the building of the vast temple ; and so it came to pass that the days of the big willow tree were numbered, for it would be wanted, with many others, to form the roof.

Heitaro tried to save the tree again by offering every other he had on his land for nothing, but that was in vain. Even the villagers became anxious to see their willow tree built into the temple. It would bring them good luck, they thought, and in any case be a handsome gift of theirs towards the great temple.

The fatal time arrived. One night, when Heitaro and his wife and child had retired to rest and were sleeping, Heitaro was awakened by the sound of axes chopping. To his astonishment, he found his beloved wife sitting up in her bed, gazing earnestly at him, while tears rolled down her cheeks and she was sobbing bitterly.

“My dearest husband,”she said with choking voice, “ pray listen to what I tell you now, and do not doubt me. This is, unhappily, not a dream. When we married I begged you not to ask me my history, and you have never done so, but I said I would tell you some day if there should be a real occasion to do so. Unhappily, that occasion has now arrived, my dear husband. I am no less a thing than the spirit of

the willow tree you loved, and so generously saved six years ago. It was to repay you for this great kindness that I appeared to you in human form under the tree, hoping that I could live with you and make you happy for your whole life. Alas, it cannot be! They are cutting down the willow. How I feel every stroke of their axes! I must return to die, for I am part of it. My heart breaks to think also of leaving my darling child Chiyodo and of his great sorrow when he knows that his mother is no longer in the world. Comfort him, dearest husband! He is old enough and strong enough to be with you now without a mother and yet not suffer. I wish you both long lives of prosperity. Farewell, my dearest ! I must be off to the willow, for I hear them striking with their axes harder and harder, and it weakens me each blow they give.

Heitaro awoke his child just as Higo disappeared, wondering to himself if it were not a dream. No : it was no dream. Chiyodo, awaking, stretched his arms in the direction his mother had gone, crying bitterly and imploring her to come back.

“My darling child,”said Heitaro, “she has gone. She cannot come back. Come, let us dress, and go and see her funeral. Your mother was the spirit of the Great Willow.”

A little later, at the break of day, Heitaro took Chiyodo by the hand and led him to the tree. On reaching it they found it down, and already lopped of its branches. The feelings of Heitaro may be well imagined.

Strange ! In spite of united efforts, the men were unable to move the stem a single inch towards the river, in which it was to be floated to Kyoto.

On seeing this, Heitaro addressed the men.

“My friends,” said he, “the dead trunk of the tree which you are trying to move contains the spirit of my wife. Perhaps, if you will allow my little son Chiyodo to help you, it will be more easy for you ; and he would like to help in showing his last respects to his mother.’

The woodcutters were fully agreeable, and, much to their astonishment, as Chiyodo came to the back end of the log and pushed it with his little hand, the timber glided easily towards the river, his father singing the while an “Uta.” There is a well-known song or ballad in the “Uta” style said to have sprung from this event; it is sung to the present day by men drawing heavy weights or doing hard labor:

Is it not sad to see the little fellow,

Who sprang from the dew of the Kumano Willow,

And is thus far budding well ?

Heave ho, heave ho, pull hard, my lads.

The wagon could not be drawn when it came to the front of Heitaro’s house, so his little five-year-old boy Chiyodo was obliged to help, and they sang :—

**Is it not sad to see the little fellow,
Who sprang from the dew of the Kumano Willow,
And is thus far budding well ?
Heave ho, heave ho, pull hard, my lads.**

There are many different versions of this story. This is one of the most detailed. Japanese folklore rarely end “happily ever after.” The stories capture the reality of intertwined happiness and sorrow. Even the closest lovers must part for a time when one of them dies. However, these stories aren’t pessimistic. Rather, they seek to teach appreciation. We appreciate what we have more when we know it must end.

The Willow Wife

In a certain Japanese village there grew a great willow-tree. For many generations the people loved it. In the summer it was a resting-place, a place where the villagers might meet after the work and heat of the day were over, and there talk till the moonlight streamed through the branches. In winter it was like a great half-opened umbrella covered with sparkling snow.

Heitaro, a young farmer, lived quite near this tree, and he, more than any of his companions, had entered into a deep communion with the imposing willow. It was almost the first object he saw upon waking, and upon his return from work in the fields he looked out eagerly for its familiar form. Sometimes he would burn a joss-stick beneath its branches and kneel down and pray.

One day an old man of the village came to Heitaro and explained to him that the villagers were anxious to build a bridge over the river, and that they particularly wanted the great willow-tree for timber.

“For timber?” said Heitaro, hiding his face in his hands. “My dear willow-tree for a bridge, one to bear the incessant patter of feet? Never, never, old man!”

When Heitaro had somewhat recovered himself, he offered to give the old man some of his own trees, if he and the villagers would accept them for timber and spare the ancient willow.

The old man readily accepted this offer, and the willow-tree continued to stand in the village as it had stood for so many years.

One night while Heitaro sat under the great willow he suddenly saw a beautiful woman standing close beside him, looking at him shyly, as if wanting to speak.

“Honourable lady,” said he, “I will go home. I see you wait for some one. Heitaro is not without kindness towards those who love.”

“He will not come now,” said the woman, smiling.

“Can he have grown cold? Oh, how terrible when a mock love comes and leaves ashes and a grave behind!”

“He has not grown cold, dear lord.”

“And yet he does not come! What strange mystery is this?”

“He has come! His heart has been always here, here under this willow-tree.” And with a radiant smile the woman disappeared.

Night after night they met under the old willow-tree. The woman's shyness had entirely disappeared, and it seemed that she could not hear too much from Heitaro's lips in praise of the willow under which they sat.

One night he said to her: "Little one, will you be my wife—you who seem to come from the very tree itself?"

"Yes," said the woman. "Call me Higo ("Willow") and ask no questions, for love of me. I have no father or mother, and some day you will understand."

Heitaro and Higo were married, and in due time they were blessed with a child, whom they called Chiyodō. Simple was their dwelling, but those it contained were the happiest people in all Japan.

While this happy couple went about their respective duties great news came to the village. The villagers were full of it, and it was not long before it reached Heitaro's ears. The ex-Emperor Toba wished to build a temple to Kwannon in Kyōto, and those in authority sent far and wide for timber. The villagers said that they must contribute towards building the sacred edifice by presenting their great willow-tree. All Heitaro's argument and persuasion and promise of other trees were ineffectual, for neither he nor any one else could give as large and handsome a tree as the great willow.

Heitaro went home and told his wife. "Oh, wife," said he, "they are about to cut down our dear willow-tree! Before I married you I could not have borne it. Having you, little one, perhaps I shall get over it some day."

That night Heitaro was aroused by hearing a piercing cry. "Heitaro," said his wife, "it grows dark! The room is full of whispers. Are you there, Heitaro? Hark! They are cutting down the willow-tree. Look how its shadow trembles in the moonlight. I am the soul of the willow-tree! The villagers are killing me. Oh, how they cut and tear me to pieces! Dear Heitaro, the pain, the pain! Put your hands here, and here. Surely the blows cannot fall now?"

"My Willow Wife! My Willow Wife!" sobbed Heitaro.

"Husband," said Higo, very faintly, pressing her wet, agonized face close to his, "I am going now. Such a love as ours cannot be cut down, however fierce the blows. I shall wait for you and Chiyodo—— My hair is falling through the sky! My body is breaking!"

There was a loud crash outside. The great willow-tree lay green and disheveled upon the ground. Heitaro looked round for her he loved more than anything else in the world. Willow Wife had gone!



ASH
Fraxinus excelsior



BEECH
Fagus sylvatica



HORNBEAM
Carpinus betulus



SILVER BIRCH
Betula pendula



HORSE CHESTNUT
Aesculus hippocastanum



SWEET CHESTNUT
Castanea sativa



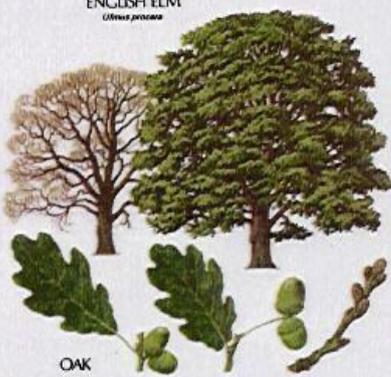
COMMON OR ENGLISH ELM
Ulmus procera



WYCH ELM
Ulmus glabra



SYCAMORE
Acer pseudoplatanus



OAK
SESSILE OAK *Quercus petraea* PEDUNCULATE OAK *Quercus robur*



TURKEY OAK
Quercus cerris



WALNUT
Juglans regia

WREN

wren

When wren whirrs from stone to furze the world around
her slows, for wren is quick, so quick she blurs the air
through which she flows, yes –

Rapid wren is needle, rapid wren is pin – and wren’s song
is sharp-song, briar-song, thorn-song, and wren’s flight
is dart-flight, flick-flight, light-flight, yes –

Each wren etches, stitches, switches, *glitches*, yes –

Now you think you see wren, now you know you don’t.

King of the Birds (A Traditional Zulu Story)

"Gogo?" Thobeka was the first to break the silence around the fire this night.

Gogo looked at the most inquisitive of her grandchildren with a broad smile.

"Yes, my dear one," she answered.

"Gogo, I know that the mighty Lion, Bhubesi, is king of all the animals. Is he King also of the birds?"

"Ah, that is an interesting question, Thobeka." The children sensed a story coming and drew even closer together. "You are right when you say that Lion is the king of all the animals. And as for the birds, well, I will have to tell you about the time they decided to have a leader of their own. . . Kwasuka sukela. . . ."

Some time after the Creator had finished making the beasts of the sea, land and sky, as He was busy putting the finishing touch to His work by creating People, Nkwazi (nkwah'-zee), the great Fish Eagle, called a meeting of all the birds. And they came, from the Flamingo to the Weaver, from the Warbler to the Owl, they came.

"Ah-hem," Nkwazi began by clearing his throat. The chatter died down as everyone turned their gaze on the magnificent eagle. "I have asked you all to be here for a very important reason. As you all know, Lion, the great Bhubesi, is the king of all the beast of the land. But he hardly dare speak for us, the great winged creatures of the air! It is my suggestion that we chose from among our number a bird to be our sovereign leader!" A ripple of chattering began again as the birds turned to one another to discuss the idea. "Ah-hem!" Nkwazi cleared his throat once more. He waited until he had the attention of all present. "As I am the most majestic and regal bird present, I suggest that I, Nkwazi, be the King of the birds!"

A great deal of mumbling began from all corners of the gathering. Then one voice rose above the others, demanding attention.

"Yes, Nkwazi, you are indeed majestic." It was the giant Eagle Owl, Khova (koh'-vah) speaking. "However I actually think that it is I who should be the King of the winged animals. You see, I have the largest eyes of any of the birds. I can see everything that happens, and therefore am very wise. It is wisdom we need in a leader more than stateliness."

Again a low murmur went through the crowd until a third voice demanded attention. "I acknowledge Khova's wisdom and Nkwazi's regal bearing, however I would propose that I be King of the birds." Kori Bustard, Ngqithi (ng*ee'-tee) walked to the

centre of the circle as he spoke. "I am the largest of all the winged kingdom. Certainly strength is an important factor in leadership!"

All the birds began to speak at once. Some threw their support behind the Eagle, some believed the Owl should be the King, while others liked the Kori Bustard. Finally after a long period of arguing, a little voice was heard rising above the din.

"Excuse me. Excuse me, please!" It was Ncedede (n~ay'-day), the tiny Neddicky (a small, quick-moving southern African warbler). He was so small and insignificant looking that he was easily overlooked. Finally the crowd became silent and allowed the little bird his say. "If we are going to elect a King of the birds, well, I think it should be me!"

Everyone broke into laughter. Surely this miniature warbler was jesting! Ncedede, King of the birds! Unthinkable! Silly creature for even thinking it! What, the audacity of this little thing! What arrogance! What impudence!

"And what reason would you give for having us elect you as our King?" asked Nkwazi staring into Ncedede's eyes.

"Well," began Ncedede, "no real reason, besides to say that I should be given every bit as much opportunity as anyone else!"

While they laughed at Ncedede's suggestion, the assembly was impressed with the little fellow's courage!

"What we need is a competition!" decided Nkwazi. "We will have a contest to see who is fit to be our King!" Everyone seemed to like this idea. It was agreed that on the first day after the full moon the birds would again gather. They would meet on the open veld when the sun was high in the sky. And when the sun touched the tallest tip of the mountain, the birds would become airborne. The one who could then fly the highest and touch the hand of God would become the King.

On the appointed day the birds assembled. Patiently they watched the sun make her way down from the sky. At the exact moment she touched the tallest peak of the mountain, the birds all rose into the air. It was a magnificent sight to see.

Now, little Ncedede was there. He was determined to prove that he had just as much right as anyone else to the kingship. But he knew that his little wings could not lift him very far. He had therefore made a special plan. Just before the birds took off, Ncedede silently crept underneath the wing of the mighty Fish Eagle. He carefully pushed his way deep down into the raptor's largest feathers. Nkwazi was so busy concentrating on the descent of the sun, he didn't feel a thing.

Higher and higher the birds soared. The little ones fell out of the race after a short time. Slowly they drifted back down to earth to watch the others. Soon all but three of the birds had dropped out of the competition. Eagle, Owl and Bustard fought to see

who would claim the prize. They were so tired, but they pushed on, higher and higher. The strain was too much for owl, and with a resigned "Hoo-hoo" he dove back toward firm ground. Now it was Nkwazi and Ngqithi. Up and up they went, closer and closer to the hand of God. But no matter how much he tried, the feat was too much for the heavy Bustard. After a final pull with his mighty wings, he called to Nkwazi. "Ah, my friend, it seems you are the winner. I can go no further."

That confession seemed to temporarily strengthen the almost spent Eagle; he gathered his last bit of strength and climbed beyond the Bustard.

"Wheeeeeee-whee-whee!" The victorious sound of Nkwazi's call filled the sky.

"Not so fast, Nkwazi!" chirped Ncedede, and he shot out from under one of the mighty bird's feathers. "You have not won yet!" And with that Ncedede rose above Nkwazi to touch the hand of God. No matter how hard he tried, Nkwazi just didn't have the strength left to climb any farther. With a groan he allowed himself to begin gliding down to earth.

Now, all the birds below had watched this and were angered by Ncedede's trickery. As Ncedede returned to the soil he did not find the kingly welcome he expected. Instead every bird in the kingdom was ready to pluck the feathers from little Ncedede's back. But the quick little bird saw their anger and quickly flew into a deserted snake hole.

"Come out, Ncedede!" snapped the bustard. "Come out and get the prize that you deserve!"

"Yes!" echoed all the other birds. "Come on, Ncedede! Where's your brave face now?"

But Ncedede stayed hidden. The birds guarded the hole until long after sunset, waiting for Ncedede to show his face. All through the night they waited, thinking that Ncedede had to come out for food or water soon. In the morning Ncedede had still not appeared. "Listen," said Nkwazi, "I am faint from hunger. We do not all need to guard the hole. I suggest we take turns until the little joker decides to come out!" Everyone agreed, most of them being terribly tired.

"I am not yet weary or hungry," volunteered the owl. "I do not mind taking the first watch. Just mind that someone comes back in an hour or two to relieve me!"

A quick roster was drawn up and everyone but owl went off to sleep or hunt for food. Owl was used to being still and waiting for his prey. He waited and waited it seemed to him forever. Finally he decided to close just one of his eyes. "After all," he thought, "even one of my eyes is bigger and can see better than both eyes on any other bird!" He closed his right eye and peered into the dark hole with his left eye. Several minutes later Owl decided to switch and so he open the right eye and closed the left. This went on for quite a while, until one time Owl forgot to open the right eye when he closed the left. There he was, both eyes closed! And he fell fast asleep.

Now this was the moment for which Ncedo had been waiting. Before the opportunity was lost, Ncedo shot out of the hole and disappeared into the forest. Eagle, who was on his way to relieve Owl, saw the little creature leave and cried out. He went to owl and found the bird in a deep sleep.

"Wake up, you fool!" he shouted at owl. "You fell asleep and Ncedo got away!"

Well, Owl was so embarrassed by his mistake, to this day he sleeps during the day and does his hunting at night so that none of the other birds will bother him about having been caught sleeping on the job. And Ncedo, he hides out in the forest, flittering from here to there, never stopping anywhere long enough to be caught.

"So," Gogo," asked Thobeka when several moments of silence had elapsed, "who then became the king of the birds?"

"That, my child," Gogo looked at her granddaughter with a smile, "no one knows. I think they are arguing to this day about the position!"



How the wren became king of the birds

Many years ago, all the birds of the world gathered to decide which of them would be the king of the birds.

After many days of debate, they decided that they would hold a contest. Whichever bird could fly the highest would be the king of the birds.

On the day of the competition, all the birds took off into the air. The small song birds quickly tired, their fragile wings unable to carry them far. They were soon joined by the ducks, crows, and many others. In short order, only the strongest of the eagles still climbed into the sky.

This eagle climbed higher and higher, until the last of his competition gave up and returned to earth. He smugly congratulated himself, and began his descent. He was exhausted from the competition, and needed to recover. As he was falling, he heard a small bright voice above him calling "I am king! I am king!" It was the little brown wren, fluttering above him. She had carefully, quietly, hidden among his feathers, and ridden his back into the sky.



The eagle was furious, but he was too exhausted from the competition to fly higher.

When the wren landed the small birds cried in joy and surprise. They were sure that one of the larger birds would win the competition, but had been too afraid to complain. The large birds were furious. "You only won through trickery and cunning, and that's not fair," they complained.

“Eagle would have won through strength and brawn. Why is that better than cunning? If you have your doubts name another challenge and I will win once more,” the wren replied.

The large birds chatted among themselves, and came up with a solution. “We have a new competition. Whichever bird can swoop the lowest will be the king of the birds.”

The birds began the new competition, diving down to glide along the ground. Wren saw a small mouse-hole in the earth and climbed into it. She called out “I am king! I am king! I am the lowest!”

The large birds were furious, and decided that the wren could be the king, but she would never rule them. They each took turns standing guard at the hole, waiting to kill the wren if she tried to climb out.

Days passed, and wren stubbornly remained in her hole. One night, the owl was guarding the hole, watching the wren with large yellow eyes. When the morning sunlight peeked over the horizon, it momentarily blinded the owl. The wren saw this as her chance, and quickly escaped from the hole.



The little brown wren is still the king of the birds, but she is so afraid of the eagles and hawks that she stays hidden in hedges and bushes. They will kill her if given the chance, as they are ashamed that she won their competitions. All the other birds visit her for advice, as she is so clever and cunning.

10 facts about wrens

1. Wrens eat spiders and insects which they find while hopping and dashing along the ground and probing in crevices with their long thin bill. Their scientific name, *Troglodytes*, means “cave dweller” in reference to this behaviour or to their delicately constructed nests which have only a small opening.
2. Wrens were first recorded in Anglo-Saxon times though there is fossil evidence from the last Ice age, 10-120,000 years ago.
3. An adult wren weighs about the same as a £1 coin. They are the lightest birds found in Britain the exception of the firecrest and goldcrest.
4. For such a small bird the wren has an astonishingly loud song. In fact, per unit weight, it sings at ten times the power of a crowing cockerel!
5. In Britain the Wren population can be devastated by a severe winter, but the species' high egg productivity means that numbers usually recover after a few years.
6. European Wrens are both sedentary (as in Britain) but will be migratory in parts of Europe, flying anything up to 2500 km (1500 miles) with some migrating all the way from Scandinavia down to Spain.
7. Wrens will use open-fronted and tit nest boxes for nesting and winter roosting (up to 60 have been recorded in one box).
8. European wrens are polygamous (males will mate with several females) and most are strongly territorial, at least during the breeding season. Males will construct many nests often 6-12 which the females will choose and then line with moss, leaves or feathers.
9. The wren lays between one and nine eggs which only the female incubates, though both adults will feed the young chicks.
10. Around 35 to 44 different subspecies of wren have been identified worldwide, which differ in size, overall colouration and the extent of barring on the plumage

