



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR

Class: VIII	Department: ENGLISH	Date of submission: MAY 2022
Worksheet No: 8	Topic: When You Are Old Study Notes	Note: For reference only

When you are old- A Poem by W.B. Yeats

The depiction of this poem in your main course book is in the form of a comic adaptation –where the visuals enhance the overall impact, the emotion being conveyed and also the unique features of the characters!

Short Summary of the Poem:

In summary, ‘When You Are Old’ is a lyric poem in which Yeats – or, perhaps more accurately, the speaker of the poem, who could or could not be Yeats himself – addresses a woman he loves. He asks her to return to the poem he has written for her when she is old and grey and tired, and to use the speaker’s poem as a way of remembering her youthful beauty, and how many people loved and admired her (whether truly or not).

But one person (i.e. he, the speaker himself) loved her for her ‘pilgrim soul’ or questing nature, as well as her youthful good looks; indeed, the poet tells her that he loved her even as she got older and lost her looks, and grew more sorrowful as old age approached.

And as she bends down before the ‘glowing bars’ of the fire, the speaker asks that she murmur to herself how the love leaving her went to wander on the mountains and hid away among the stars (suggesting a spurned lover who is doomed to wander the wilderness alone, seeking solace among poetry and natural beauty).

Of course, the power of this short poem derives not just from the sentiment. Yeats (or the speaker) and the beautiful addressee of the poem were both young when he wrote the poem, but he can already foresee the fact that she will grow sorrowful and that he will continue to love her even as her youthful looks give way to age.

Theme and Meaning of the stanzas in the Poem

Major Themes in “When You Are Old” are Love, Rejection and Time.

- To express pure love, the poet invites his beloved to have a glance at the time when she will be old and will not be surrounded by fake lovers. Therefore, she should understand his feelings toward her.
- Throughout the poem, he tries to make her realize that her existing company loves her for her beauty, but one day she would grow old and regret lost opportunities. The speaker addresses someone and asks this person to imagine old age, a time of grey hair and general tiredness. The speaker tells the addressee to pick up this book when she is falling asleep by the fire, and to read from it, while dreaming of the soft and shadowed look of her own eyes in her youthful days.

WHEN YOU ARE OLD

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

William Butlet Yeats

