

Home Thoughts from Abroad

I always think this poem sounds as if it was written quite quickly and developed as the poet was writing. I like the way it starts with short lines and, as the poet gets into his stride, they lengthen and become more considered. I also like the way the rhymes are present but don't conform to a pattern. Because of this, it makes a good poem to use in a 'word wall' format so that students can explore the rhyme patterns and make predictions about the way the poem is going to develop. (See 'Techniques for how to make a Word Wall.)

It also makes a handy text to display as continuous prose so that students can try to discover where the line endings occur.

O, to be in England now that April 's there, and whoever wakes in England sees, some morning, unaware, that the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf, while the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough in England—now!

In doing this you will also see (and perhaps they will, too) that this verse is all one sentence.

Looking at the mood of the poem, you might try a diamond sorting activity with different emotions. How does the poet seem to feel? Nostalgic, regretful, enthusiastic, happy, sad, envious, energetic, hopeful, resigned... There are nine to be going on with – you can substitute others or, in setting up the activity, ask students to submit their own suggestions (on paper, secretly). Another variation is to leave one diamond 'card' blank for the pair or group to add their own term. To me, the poem combines a kind of envious desire to be in England with a tremendously exuberant appreciation of spring.

Further thoughts

- Write a parody: 'Oh to be in Brighton / Now that summer's here...' or even an ironic parody 'Oh, to be in History / Now that the sun is out...'
- Compare this poem with another from the Victorian period? Does it have the same knowledge of English countryside? Does it have the same easy style?