

The Listeners by Walter de la Mare (1912)



'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
Of the forest's ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
Above the Traveller's head:
And he smote upon the door again a second time;
'Is there anybody there?' he said.
But no one descended to the Traveller;
No head from the leaf-fringed sill
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
Where he stood perplexed and still.
But only a host of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
To that voice from the world of men:
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
That goes down to the empty hall,
Harkening in an air stirred and shaken
By the lonely Traveller's call.

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And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
Their stillness answering his cry,
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
'Neath the starred and leafy sky;
For he suddenly smote on the door, even
Louder, and lifted his head:—
'Tell them I came, and no one answered,
That I kept my word,' he said.
Never the least stir made the listeners,
Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
From the one man left awake:
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward,
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

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Questions

1

Write down where and when the poem is set, then find and copy some words or phrases from the poem that let you know.

	Answer	Evidence
When?		
Where?		

2

Draw lines to match the words with their synonyms.

champed

lived in

smote

bit

perplexed

confused

dwelt

struck

But only a host of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house...

3

What do you think the writer means by phantom listeners?

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Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken...

4

What do you think **hearken**ing means?

5

What are two adjectives in the poem that describe how the traveller is feeling?

6

What clues are there that the house might be abandoned?

7

Summarise the events of the poem in as few words as possible.

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Never the least stir made the listeners,
Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
From the one man left awake:

8

Which word in this section of the poem is no longer used in modern English and what word do we use instead?

9

Which word do you think best describes the theme of this poem? Circle one.

joyful

mysterious

romantic

angry

10

Why do you think the traveller was visiting the house?

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Answers

1

Write down where and when the poem is set, then find and copy some words or phrases from the poem that let you know.

	Answer	Evidence
When?	at night time	forest's ferny floor, the lone house, the still house
Where?	an empty house in a forest	moonlit, moonlight, moonbeams

2

Draw lines to match the words with their synonyms.

champed — lived in
 smote — bit
 perplexed — confused
 dwelt — struck

**But only a host of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house...**

3

What do you think the writer means by phantom listeners?
The writer means ghosts.

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Harkening in an air stirred and shaken...

4

What do you think **harkening** means?

Harkening means listening. The ghosts are listening to the traveller and the air has been stirred and shaken by his words.

5

What are two adjectives in the poem that describe how the traveller is feeling?

perplexed lonely

6

What clues are there that the house might be abandoned?

Any of the following:

- **A bird flew out of a turret when the traveller knocked, so it might be living there now that there are no people.**
- **The window sill is leaf-fringed, which means the plants are overgrowing so no one is looking after the house.**
- **The forest is ferny and there is lots of grass for the horse to eat, which might mean that no one has walked on it for a long time.**
- **The hall is described as empty and shadowy.**

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7

Summarise the events of the poem in as few words as possible.

Child's own answer, such as:

- A traveller stops his horse at a house in a forest and knocks on the door. No one answers but he thinks there might be ghosts inside, so he tells them to pass on a message that he visited.

Never the least stir made the listeners,
Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
From the one man left awake:

8

Which word in this section of the poem is no longer used in modern English and what word do we use instead?

'Spake' is no longer used; we would use 'spoke'.

9

Which word do you think best describes the theme of this poem? Circle one.

joyful

mysterious

romantic

angry

10

Why do you think the traveller was visiting the house?

Child's own answer, such as:

- The traveller had promised to meet someone there.
- The traveller wanted to find somewhere to rest.

We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. As far as possible, the contents of this resource are reflective of current professional research. However, please be aware that every child is different and information can quickly become out of date. The information given here is intended for general guidance purposes only and may not apply to your specific situation.



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