

## Reading for Information

**ESSAY** Shelley wrote *A Defense of Poetry* after reading a composition in which a friend and fellow poet jokingly claimed that poetry no longer had a place in society. Because it seemed to Shelley that this view was in fact becoming widely held, he made a passionate argument for the value of poets and poetry.

# from *A Defense of Poetry*

*Percy Bysshe Shelley*

**P**OETRY is indeed something divine. It is at once the center and circumference of knowledge; . . . Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the color of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. . .

Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation<sup>1</sup> of the spirit which it breathes; its secret alchemy<sup>2</sup> turns to potable<sup>3</sup> gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms.

1. **incarnation** (ɪnˈkɑː-nəˈʃən): appearance in earthly form.

2. **alchemy** (ælˈkɛ-mē): chemical reaction.

3. **potable** (pōˈtə-bəl): drinkable.

## Reading-Writing Connection

### WRITING PROMPT

**WRITE A POEM** Reread the excerpt from "A Defense of Poetry" on page 857. Then write a **poem** in which you attempt to capture the "sleeping beauty" of an element of nature, as Shelley does in "Ode to the West Wind" and "To a Skylark." Try to use **rhyme, meter, personification**, and other devices Shelley uses in his poems.

### SELF-CHECK

**A powerful poem will . . .**

- contain fresh images and original figurative language
- capture the feelings and ideas the natural element evokes in you

### GRAMMAR AND STYLE

**CREATE EFFECTIVE IMAGERY** Shelley was an inventive poet who created striking and exquisite imagery through his use of personification. **Personification** is a figure of speech in which an object, animal, or idea is given human qualities. In the following passage from "Ode to the West Wind," Shelley personifies the sea life in the Mediterranean to show how powerfully the west wind affects it:

*The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear  
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know  
Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,  
And tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!* (lines 39–42)

Notice how Shelley uses **predicates** such as *know thy voice* and *grow gray with fear* to assign characteristics that would normally be applied to humans. He attributes the emotion of *fear* to the sea plants and speaks of the *voice* of the west wind. This use of personification enables readers to form a vivid mental picture of the wind and its power.

**PRACTICE** Copy each of the following lines from "Ode to the West Wind." Then compose your own lines about an element of nature, mimicking Shelley's use of personification in order to create effective imagery.

#### EXAMPLE

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere; / Destroyer and preserver;  
hear, oh, hear!  
*Lonely sky, which art weeping everywhere, / Mourner and rager; sleep, oh sleep!*

1. O thou, / Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed / The wingéd seeds, where they lie cold and low, . . .
2. Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow / Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, . . .
3. Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams / The blue Mediterranean, where he lay, . . .



**SUNSHINE STATE STANDARD**  
**Writing Process**  
**Benchmark LA.1112.3.3.1** Evaluating the draft for development of ideas and content, logical organization, voice, point of view, word choice, and sentence variation.



For prewriting, revision, and editing tools, visit the **Writing Center** at [ClassZone.com](http://ClassZone.com).