

## John Keats

Using the digital [biographies resource](#),

click on the picture of John Keats and read a little about his short life and works.

You will find below the first two stanzas of Ode on a Grecian Urn , one of his five great **odes**.



This is a picture of a typical urn to have been found in ancient Greece. You will see that it is intricately decorated with characters engaged in a variety of activities.

Perhaps you might find it strange that a poet is writing a poem addressed to a large vase or container but Keats's interests go beyond the physical object and his intention was to make his reader consider ideas prompted by the beauty of his subject-matter. In other words, the urn acts as inspiration for his thoughts on other matters. Look at the picture below. Urns were highly decorated and often depicted scenes from rural life and we should assume that Keats is speaking to the characters on such an item.

You will see the first two stanzas of the poem below. Read them and reflect upon them in light of the information on the following page.

## Ode on a Grecian Urn

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,  
**Sylvan** historian, who canst thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:  
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both,  
In **Tempe** or the dales of **Arcady** ?  
What men or gods are these? What maidens **loth** ?  
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
What pipes and **timbrels** ? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet but those unheard  
Are sweeter; Therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd  
Pipe to the spirit Look at **ditties** of no tone:  
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss.  
Though winning near the goal- yet do not grieve;  
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
For ever wilt thou love and she be fair.

## Tasks

Annotate the extract, making connections with the information about the features of Romanticism outlined.

### Possible prompts

- Keats uses three images to address the urn: unravish'd bride....., Foster-child ..... and Sylvan historian. Try to explain what each of these means and the effect they have on the reader.
- There are seven questions in the first stanza. To a certain extent they are answered in the next stanza and in the remainder of the poem but what function do they perform here?
- One of the young men depicted on the urn is playing on a pipe. What conclusion does Keats come to about the fact that his melody cannot be heard?
- Underline all the examples of negatives in stanza 2. Look at how they move towards the final line and try to explain the effect this has on the reader.
- How does Keats present the theme of Mortality here? Write a short paragraph.
- Look at the way Keats presents a relationship between a man and a woman here and compare it with that presented in one other poem from the anthology.

## Extension Work

Read the remainder of the poem and consider some of the ways in which Keats presents the natural world and how it highlights aspects of Romanticism.