



There was a Boy

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This extract is what Wordsworth describes, later in his autobiographical

poem *The Prelude*, as a "spot of time". A "spot of time" for Wordsworth is a memory that remains important many years after the event. It is held in the mind from a time when, as a child we do not yet have a clear chronological sense of time. As a result these moments have a peculiar power for us later as adults.

There was a Boy; ye knew him well, ye cliffs
And islands of Winander! -- many a time,
At evening, when the earliest stars began
To move along the edges of the hills,
Rising or setting, would he stand alone,
Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering lake;
And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls
That they might answer him.—And they would
shout
Across the watery vale, and shout again,
Responsive to his call,—with quivering peals,
And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud
Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild
Of jocund din! And, when there came a pause
Of silence such as baffled his best skill:
Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice

Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

This boy was taken from his mates, and died
In childhood, ere he was full twelve years old.
Pre-eminent in beauty is the vale
Where he was born and bred: the churchyard
hangs
Upon a slope above the village-school;
And through that churchyard when my way has
led
On summer-evenings, I believe that there
A long half-hour together I have stood
Mute—looking at the grave in which he lies!

Answer the following questions in your book:

1. Describe a childhood activity involving some kind of interaction with the natural world that you engage.
2. How does Wordsworth respond to the experience of such activities? (those referred to in Q1)
3. Explain the significance of the following three symbols used in the poem:
 - a. The owls
 - b. Silence
 - c. The boy's death/grave
4. Nature and the imagination have significant roles in childhood experience. How is this represented in the poem?