The Land of Story-Books
By Robert Louis Stevenson
1913

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) was a Scottish writer who is best known for Treasure Island and The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The following poem was published in 1913 and describes a child at play. As you read this poem, take notes about the speaker—what can we conclude about him/her from the poem?

[1] At evening when the lamp is lit,
Around the fire my parents sit;
They sit at home and talk and sing,
And do not play at anything.

[5] Now, with my little gun, I crawl
All in the dark along the wall,
And follow round the forest track
Away behind the sofa back.

There, in the night, where none can spy,
[10] All in my hunter's camp I lie,
And play at books that I have read
Till it is time to go to bed.

These are the hills, these are the woods,
These are my starry solitudes;¹
[15] And there the river by whose brink
The roaring lions come to drink.

I see the others far away
As if in firelit camp they lay,
And I, like to an Indian scout,
[20] Around their party prowled² about.

So when my nurse comes in for me,
Home I return across the sea,
And go to bed with backward looks
At my dear land of Story-books.

¹ Solitude (noun): a state of being alone
² Prowl (verb): to move with stealth

The Land of Story-Books by Robert Louis Stevenson is in the public domain.
Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes a central theme of the text?
   A. Imagination and play are essential parts of a happy childhood.
   B. Creativity is an excellent substitute for friendship.
   C. As we grow older, we lose the energy of our youth.
   D. How we think of ourselves can be warped through our imaginations.

2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
   A. “At evening when the lamp is lit, / Around the fire my parents sit; / They sit at home and talk and sing, / And do not play at anything.” (Lines 1-4)
   B. “There, in the night, where none can spy, / All in my hunter’s camp I lie, / And play at books that I have read / Till it is time to go to bed.” (Lines 9-12)
   C. “These are the hills, these are the woods, / These are my starry solitudes; / And there the river by whose brink / The roaring lions come to drink.” (Lines 13-16)
   D. “So when my nurse comes in for me, / Home I return across the sea, / And go to bed with backward looks / At my dear land of Story-books.” (Lines 21-24)

3. Which of the following best describes the relationship between the child and other members of the family?
   A. The parents ignore the child to play on his or her own, to the point of being neglectful.
   B. The parents participate in the child’s play, pretending to be lions or whatever the child desires.
   C. The child ignores his or her parents for they do not play, and instead plays by him- or herself.
   D. The child resents the nurse for disrupting his or her playtime and, by extension, resents the parents as well.

4. How does stanza 4 contribute to the tone of the poem?
   A. The “starry solitudes” (Line 14) in stanza 4 contributes to the sad and lonely tone of the poem.
   B. The imagined, natural imagery (i.e. hills, woods, stars, and lions) in Stanza 4 contributes to the whimsical tone of the poem.
   C. The lions mentioned (in Stanza 4) develop the cautious tone of the poem, as if the child is pretending there is real danger;
   D. The repetition in the stanza of “These are the hills, these are the woods” (Line 13) contributes to the stubborn tone of the poem.
5. Overall, how does the author depict childhood? Cite any symbols, images, or words that contribute to this depiction.
Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Why do you think the parents in this poem “do not play at anything”? What is the author’s message in this line? Explain your answer.

2. In the context of this poem, is youth something that should be valued? Explain your answer using evidence from this text, your own experience, and other art, literature, or history in your answer.