

## the earth is a living thing

Poem by Lucille Clifton

## Sleeping in the Forest

Poem by Mary Oliver

## Gold

Poem by Pat Mora

# *What is our place in* **NATURE?**

**KEY IDEA** When you left the house to go to school this morning, was the sky clear or cloudy? How did the air feel? Did you hear birds singing or see an insect darting by? **Nature** surrounds us, but sometimes we forget to notice.

**SKETCH IT** In a small group, discuss how you fit in with the natural world. In what ways does nature affect your life? Do you think people are part of nature or separate from it? Give concrete examples to support your opinion. Then make a sketch that shows your place in nature.



## ● POETIC FORM: LYRIC POETRY

A **lyric poem** is a short poem in which a single speaker expresses personal thoughts and feelings. Lyric poems cover many subjects, from love and death to everyday experiences. Like many other lyric poems, each of those you're about to read creates a strong, unified impression.

## ● LITERARY ANALYSIS: FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

**Literal language** is language that reflects the dictionary definition of words. It forms a factual statement, such as "a tree sheds its leaves in autumn." **Figurative language** expresses an idea through a more imaginative use of words: "A tree mourns its lost leaves in autumn."

Here are some types of figurative language poets frequently use:

- **Personification** gives human qualities to an animal, an object, or an idea. (*whispering trees, angrily marching ants*)
- **Similes** compare two unlike things using the word *like* or *as*. (*The stars flamed like torches.*)
- **Metaphors** compare two unlike things without using the word *like* or *as*. (*The stars were torches.*)

## ● READING SKILL: MAKE INFERENCES

To understand poetry, you will have to **make inferences**, or make logical guesses, about images and figurative language. Base these guesses on both the details of the poem and your own knowledge and experience. As you read, use charts like the one shown to record striking or puzzling lines or phrases from each poem. Then record your inferences.

Title: "Sleeping in the Forest"		
Lines and Phrases	What I Know from Reading or Experience	Inference
"I slept/as never before, a stone/on the riverbed"	The speaker compares herself to a stone. Stones are completely still.	The speaker slept soundly, without moving.

### Lucille Clifton:

#### An Original Voice

Though Lucille Clifton was always comfortable when it came to writing, she says, "I had to learn that poetry could sound like me." After writing in traditional forms, Clifton discovered that good poetry could sound like everyday speech.



Lucille Clifton  
born 1936

### Mary Oliver:

#### Nature's Poet

Mary Oliver finds her inspiration in exploring nature. Oliver describes the writer's life as "an unstoppable urge toward that life of the imagination.



Mary Oliver  
born 1935

I don't think I have been bored one day in my life, you know, or an hour."

### Pat Mora:

#### Poetry Pioneer

Pat Mora, who is Mexican American, has helped pioneer poetry about the Mexican-American experience. Since she grew up outside of El Paso, Texas, she also loves to write about the desert.



Pat Mora  
born 1942



#### MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For more on these poets, visit the Literature Center at [ClassZone.com](http://ClassZone.com).

# the earth is a living thing

Lucille Clifton

is a black shuffling bear  
ruffling its wild back and tossing  
mountains into the sea

is a black hawk circling  
5 the burying ground circling the bones  
picked clean and discarded<sup>1</sup>

is a fish black blind in the belly of water  
is a diamond blind in the black belly of coal **A**

is a black and living thing  
10 is a favorite child  
of the universe  
feel her rolling her hand  
in its kinky hair  
feel her brushing it clean **B**

## **A FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE**

Reread the title and lines 1–8. To what four things is the earth being compared?

## **B FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE**

Reread lines 10–14. What relationship between the earth and the universe is suggested by this use of **personification**?

## **ANALYZE VISUALS**

**Compare** the style of this art with the style of the art on page 559. Which is more realistic?

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1. **discarded** (dĭ-skārd'əd): thrown away; gotten rid of.









*The Orchard* (1997), Peter Davidson. Oil on paper, 37.5 cm × 44 cm. Private collection. Photo © Bridgeman Art Library.

# Sleeping in the FOREST

Mary Oliver

I thought the earth  
remembered me, she  
took me back so tenderly, arranging  
her dark skirts, her pockets  
5 full of lichens<sup>1</sup> and seeds. I slept **C**  
as never before, a stone  
on the riverbed, nothing  
between me and the white fire of the stars  
but my thoughts, and they floated  
10 light as moths among the branches  
of the perfect trees. All night  
I heard the small kingdoms breathing  
around me, the insects, and the birds  
who do their work in the darkness. All night  
15 I rose and fell, as if in water, grappling<sup>2</sup>  
with a luminous doom. By morning  
I had vanished at least a dozen times  
into something better. **D E**

## **C** FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Reread lines 1–5. What  
is being **personified**?

## **D** MAKE INFERENCES

Reread the last sentence  
in the poem. What do  
you think the speaker  
means by “something  
better”?

## **E** LYRIC POETRY

What thoughts and  
feelings is the speaker  
conveying in this poem?

1. **lichens** (lī'kəns): fungi that grow together with algae and form crustlike growths on rocks or tree trunks.

2. **grappling**: struggling.

# GOLD

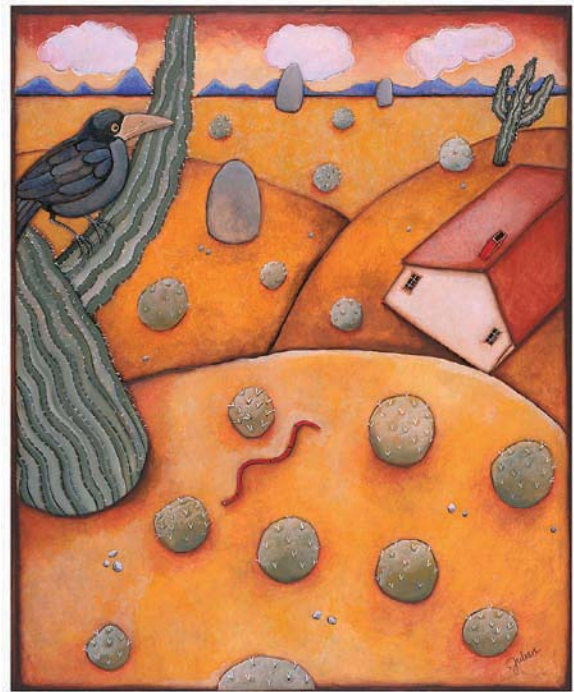
Pat Mora

When Sun paints the desert  
with its gold,  
I climb the hills.  
Wind runs round boulders, ruffles  
5 my hair. I sit on my favorite rock,  
lizards for company, a rabbit,  
ears stiff in the shade  
of a saguaro.<sup>1</sup>  
In the wind, we're all  
10 eye to eye. **F**

Sparrow on saguaro watches  
rabbit watch us in the gold  
of sun setting.  
Hawk sails on waves of light, sees  
15 sparrow, rabbit, lizards, me,  
our eyes shining,  
watching red and purple  
sand rivers stream down the hills.

I stretch my arms wide as the sky  
20 like hawk extends her wings  
in all the gold light of this, home. **G**

1. **saguaro** (sə-gwār'ō): a tall, branching cactus found in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico.



*Hacienda* (2002), Vanessa Julian. Acrylic on matteboard, 23" × 19".  
© Vanessa Julian.

**F MAKE INFERENCES**  
Reread lines 1–10. What can you **infer** about the speaker's connection to nature?

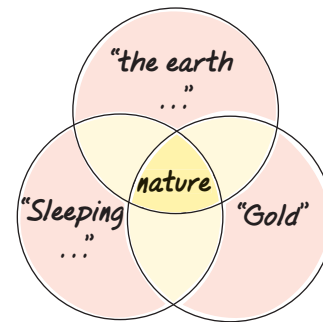
**G FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE**  
Reread lines 19–21. What two **similes** are used to describe the speaker's arms?

## Comprehension

- 1. Recall** What living things is the earth compared to in “the earth is a living thing”?
- 2. Clarify** What are the “small kingdoms” that the speaker hears in “Sleeping in the Forest”?
- 3. Represent** Where, and at what time of day, does the poem “Gold” take place? Make a drawing illustrating the setting described in lines 5–18.

## Literary Analysis

- 4. Make Inferences** Review the charts you created as you read. Which inferences most helped you understand the poems? Explain your answers.
- 5. Examine Figurative Language** What **similes**, **metaphors**, or examples of **personification** in these poems helped you see **nature** in a fresh way? Give three examples. For each one, tell what type of figurative language was used and why you found it to be effective.
- 6. Interpret Meaning** Did the ending of “Sleeping in the Forest” surprise you? Reread lines 14–18. Then tell what feeling you think these lines try to capture.
- 7. Compare and Contrast** Use a Venn diagram like the one shown to examine similarities and differences among the three poems. Think about such things as the setting, the speaker, and the **mood**, or feeling, of each poem. Then decide which two poems you think are most similar.
- 8. Evaluate Lyric Poetry** Which of the poems do you think was most successful at capturing the speaker’s thoughts and feelings? Include specific details from the poem to support your answer.



## Extension and Challenge

- 9. Big Question Activity** Reread the question on page 554. How would the speaker of each poem answer this question? After you’ve decided, consider whether the speakers’ attitudes have affected how you feel about your own place in nature.
- 10. Speaking and Listening** Lyric poems are known for their strong, melodic rhythms. They often use repetition to emphasize emotional experiences. In a group, take turns reading each poem aloud. Which of the poems do you think has an especially appealing sound or rhythm? Discuss your answer.

## Reading-Writing Connection

Explore the poems further by responding to these prompts. Then complete the **Grammar and Writing** exercise.

WRITING PROMPTS	SELF-CHECK
<p><b>A. Short Response: Write a Poem</b> Write a <b>short poem</b> about an aspect of <b>nature</b> that you find especially inspiring, dramatic, or appealing. Include at least two types of figurative language in your poem.</p>	<p><b>A creative poem will . . .</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• use vivid details and imagery to create a strong impression in the reader’s mind</li><li>• use figurative language to enhance the meaning</li></ul>
<p><b>B. Extended Response: Analyze Metaphors</b> Reread “the earth is a living thing.” Select three specific metaphors to explore further. Write <b>two or three paragraphs</b> explaining what view of <b>nature</b> is suggested by each metaphor.</p>	<p><b>An effective analysis will . . .</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• explain how the metaphors relate to the poem’s meaning</li><li>• give reasons and evidence to support the explanation</li></ul>

### GRAMMAR AND WRITING

**USE CORRECT SENTENCE TYPE** In order for your sentences to serve their correct purposes and reflect the emotions you intend, be sure to use the correct sentence type. A **declarative** sentence makes a statement and ends with a period. An **interrogative** sentence asks a question and ends with a question mark. An **imperative** sentence makes a request or gives a command (with the understood subject being *you*) and usually ends with a period. An **exclamatory** sentence shows strong feeling and ends with an exclamation point.

*Original:* How long has this mountain been here.  
I can’t believe its beauty.

*Revised:* How long has this mountain been here?  
I can’t believe its beauty!

**PRACTICE** Identify each sentence type and punctuate it correctly.

1. Its peak rises into the clouds like a skyscraper
2. How wonderful it looks
3. Can you hear how the wind whispers around it
4. Listen carefully

*For more help with sentence types, see page R60 in the Grammar Handbook.*