

To a Mouse - A Poem by Robert Burns

(Written by Burns after he had turned over the nest of a tiny field mouse with his plough. Burns was a farmer and farmers are generally far too busy to be concerned with the health of mice. This poem is another illustration of Robert Burns's tolerance to all creatures and his humanity.)

Teacher Notes

- Read through the original poem, using the modern translation, to discuss the Scottish vocabulary with the children.
- Spend time looking at the words, comparing and analyzing.
- Build up a word wall as you work through the poem.

Activity

- Teachers read the poem TWICE Pupils THEN try to fill in the blanks from the list of jumbled words. (See below)
- Ask one or two pupils to read out what they have written (this will depend on the sensitivity of the pupils, but can be fun).
- After the pupils have had one try they can again LOOK at the words for five minutes, then try again.

This can be done in pairs or selected groups.

To A Mouse by Robert Burns

Wee, sleekit, cowran, tim'rous beastie,
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bickering brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,
Wi' murd'ring pattle!

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen-icker in a thrave 'S a
sma' request:
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,
An' never miss't!

Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's winds ensuin,
Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' wast,
An' weary Winter comin fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
Thou thought to dwell,
Till crash! the cruel coulter past
Out thro' thy cell.

That wee-bit heap o' leaves an' stibble,
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!
Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble,
But house or hald.
To thole the Winter's sleety dribble,
An' cranreuch cauld!

But Mousie, thou are no thy-lane,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men,
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!

Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But Och! I backward cast my e'e,
On prospects drear!
An' forward, tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear

To A Mouse - Original

Wee, sleekit, cowran, tim'rous beastie,
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!

Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bickering brattle!

I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,
Wi' murd'ring pattle!

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen-icker in a thrave 'S a sma' request:
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,
An' never miss't!

Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's winds ensuin,
Baith snell an' keen!

Modern Day Translation

Small, crafty, cowering, timorous little beast,
O, what a panic is in your little breast!

You need not start away so hasty
With argumentative chatter!

I would be loath to run and chase you,
With murdering plough-staff.

I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
And justifies that ill opinion
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor, earth born companion
And fellow mortal!

I doubt not, sometimes, but you may steal;
What then? Poor little beast, you must live!
An odd ear in twenty-four sheaves Is a
small request;
I will get a blessing with what is left,
And never miss it.

Your small house, too, in ruin!
Its feeble walls the winds are scattering!
And nothing now, to build a new one,
Of coarse grass green!
And bleak December's winds coming,
Both bitter and piercing!

(Both poems continued on next page)

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' wast,
An' weary Winter comin fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
Thou thought to dwell,
Till crash! the cruel coulter past
Out thro' thy cell.

That wee-bit heap o' leaves an' stibble,
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!
Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble,
But house or hald.
To thole the Winter's sleety dribble,
An' cranreuch cauld!

But Mousie, thou are no thy-lane,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men,
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!

Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But Och! I backward cast my e'e,
On prospects drear!
An' forward, tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear

You saw the fields laid bare and wasted,
And weary winter coming fast,
And cozy here, beneath the blast,
You thought to dwell,
Till crash! the cruel plough passed
Out through your cell.

That small bit heap of leaves and stubble,
Has cost you many a weary nibble!
Now you are turned out, for all your trouble,
Without house or holding,
To endure the winter's sleety dribble,
And hoar-frost cold.

But little Mouse, you are not alone,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes of mice and men
Go often askew,
And leave us nothing but grief and pain,
For promised joy!

Still you are blessed, compared with me!
The present only touches you:
But oh! I backward cast my eye,
On prospects dreary!
And forward, though I cannot see,
I guess and fear!

To A Mouse Activity

Wee sleekit, cow'rin, tim'rous beastie,
 O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
 Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
 Wi bickering brattle!
 I wad be laith to rin an chase thee,
 Wi murdering _____

I'm truly sorry man's dominion
 Has broken Nature's social union,
 An justifies that ill opinion,
 Which makes thee startle
 At me, thy poor, earth-born _____
 An fellow mortal!

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;
 What then? Poor beastie, thou maun live!
 A daimen icker in a thrave
 'S a sma request;
 I'll get a blessin wi the _____
 An never _____

Thy wee bit housie, too, in ruin!
 Its silly wa's the win's are strewin!
 An naething, now, to big a new ane,
 O foggage green!
 An bleak December's win's _____
 Baith snell an _____

Thou saw the fields laid bare an waste,
 An weary winter comin fast,
 An cozie here, beneath the _____
 Thou thought to dwell, _____
 Till crash! the cruel coulter _____
 Out thro thy _____

That wee bit heap o leaves an stibble,
 Has cost thee monie a' weary _____
 Now thou's turn'd out, for a thy trouble,
 But house or hald,
 To thole the winter's sleety _____
 An cranreuch _____

But Mousie, thou art no thy lane,
 In proving foresight may be _____
 The best laid schemes o mice an men
 Gang aft agley,
 An lea'e us nought but grief an _____
 For promis'd joy!,

Still thou art blest, compar'd wi me!
 The present only toucheth _____
 But och! I backward cast my _____
 On prospects drear!
 An forward. tho I canna _____
 I guess an _____

cauld	cell	blast	vain	lave	keen	e'e
miss't	pain	nibble	fear	ensuin	dribble	
pattle	see	companion	thee	union	past	

What do these words mean? Can you produce a translation for each one?