

TEXT	THREE POEMS
AUTHOR	Christina Rossetti
THEMES	Travel (unit 8), feelings and moods (unit 13), the written word (unit 19)
VOCABULARY	Time, the seasons, travel
WRITING	Students write poems.
SPEAKING	Students interview each other and answer in the role of someone else.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894, see portrait on the Worksheet) was one of an extraordinarily talented family of Italian descent who lived in London in the Victorian period. Her father moved to London in 1824 and all the children were born and brought up in England. Rossetti's reputation has survived the critical fashions of the 20th century and she is now seen as a significant figure for feminist literature. Although her religious poems are not as popular as they once were – sometimes sounding unfashionably pious and devotional – her lyric and highly original narrative poetry is greatly admired. It has been said that Elizabeth Browning was the greatest Victorian intellectual female poet whereas Rossetti is the greater lyricist.

WARMER

Find pictures of different themed calendars (about six) – these might have topics such as: a city, a football team, animals, paintings, singers and bands, the countryside, etc. Ask students to talk about who of their family and friends might like to have these calendars. Ask them to comment on how useful it is to have a calendar at home and if they enjoy changing the picture at the end of the month. Ask students whether they use calendars like these themselves. If not, how do they keep track of the days and weeks?

ABOUT YOU

Use the questions to introduce the themes of the poems. For the first question, suggest students think about methods of measuring time and the way the natural world shows us time passing (day and night, things growing, people getting older, etc.).

Read the introduction. Explain that the picture is a portrait of Rossetti.

- 1 It's important students hear the poems and try reading them out loud to appreciate the sound and rhythm. They can do this in small groups. At this stage they shouldn't worry much about meaning, but try and enjoy the musicality of the poems. After they have read the poems, and still in their groups, get them to discuss what they think would be suitable illustrations for the poems.

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Possible answers

- 1 'Sing-Song' (*shower*)
- 2 'Uphill' (*knock and call*), 'Sing-Song' (*speak*)
- 3 All three poems mention day or days.
- 4 'Uphill' (*dark, darkness*), 'Song' (*clear*). Students might also suggest that *morning, night and moon* suggest 'light'.
- 5 'Uphill' (*go, journey, travellers, come*), 'Song' (*follow*), 'Sing-Song' (*swift, runs*). Students might also suggest *stop and stay* as related to ceasing movement.
- 6 'Uphill' (*friend, travellers, those, they, me, all*), 'Song' (*we*), 'Sing-Song' (*sage*).

VOCABULARY

- 3 This is a good activity for students to do in pairs.

Answers

- 1 Check suggestions by saying them out loud and seeing if they rhyme.
- 2 Answers might include: birds, athletes, some vehicles, etc. or even more abstract ideas like holidays or the weekend.
- 3 Answers might include: money, friends, etc. or even more abstract ideas like happiness or knowledge.

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Answers

- 1 sage 2 resting-place 3 inn 4 uphill

WRITING

- 5 The poems should be written in pairs or small groups. Allocate one of the topics to each third of the class. The first step is to brainstorm topic vocabulary. Students then talk about the topic according to their own ideas and experiences. Finally, they use the frame provided to write their poem. Stress that the poem doesn't have to rhyme.

MIXED ABILITY

Stronger students do the same writing task but they should write poems that include all three topics. They could also add some further lines, starting the sentences as they wish.

SPEAKING

- 6 Clarify that students should think of someone to answer as, but not say who that person is until their partner has tried to guess the age and gender of the person. If you set up the activity as a class mingle, students can change partners and repeat the interview, answering as the same person or choosing a new persona.

MIXED ABILITY

Doing this as a class mingle means the weaker students can repeat the questions and answers several times. It becomes a drill which helps them develop confidence through repetition.