

Learning objective: Consider in more detail what it is that Skellig might be. Also think about Mina's comments on school and compare them to ideas in Blake's poetry.

Starter:

Hand out the first two stanzas of 'The Schoolboy' (on attached sheet) and students try to order them, working with a partner if they wish. Give support, such as to look for a first line that makes sense and to try to group the lines into two distinct groups. Discuss different versions of the poem and which work best and why.

Introduction:

Hand out the correct version of the poem. What is the poet 'saying' in the poem? Take ideas. Students summarise the meaning of the poem in one sentence for each stanza. Discuss students' summaries.

Development:

Read chapter 14 and make a list of all the animals that Michael uncovers as he digs in the garden. How is the garden made to seem so alive?

Read chapter 15. Look again at 'The Schoolboy' and decide why Mina might have quoted the poem at Michael. What are children described as in the poem? What is the term for this (metaphor).

Plenary:

What similarities are there between 'The Schoolboy' and Michael's recent experiences? What do you think the author of the book, David Almond, might think about school?

Resource sheet 1

The distant huntsman winds his horn,
The little ones spend the day,
Oh! what sweet company.
And the sky-lark sings with me.
In sighing and dismay.
But to go to school in a summer morn,
Under a cruel eye outworn,
I love to rise in a summer morn,
When the birds sing on every tree;
Oh! it drives all joy away;

The Schoolboy

I love to rise in a summer morn,
When the birds sing on every tree;
The distant huntsman winds his horn,
And the sky-lark sings with me.
Oh! what sweet company.

But to go to school in a summer morn,
Oh! it drives all joy away;
Under a cruel eye outworn,
The little ones spend the day,
In sighing and dismay.

Ah! then at times I drooping sit,
And spend many an anxious hour.
Nor in my book can I take delight,
Nor sit in learning's bower,
Worn thro' with the dreary shower.

How can the bird that is born for joy,
Sit in a cage and sing.
How can a child when fears annoy,
But droop his tender wing,
And forget his youthful spring.

Oh! father & mother, if buds are nip'd,
And blossoms blown away,
And if the tender plants are strip'd
Of their joy in the springing day,
By sorrow and cares dismay,

How shall the summer arise in joy.
Or the summer fruits appear,
Or how shall we gather what griefs destroy
Or bless the mellowing year,
When the blasts of winter appear.