

Sea fever



The poet John Masefield went to sea at a young age but, because of illness and his strong desire to become a writer, he deserted ship. Eventually he became a journalist and poet. He wrote 'Sea fever' in 1900, when he was 22, and it is still one of the most popular British poems ever written.



I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking.

5 I must go down to the sea again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.

10 I must go down to the sea again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's like a whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

John Masefield (1878–1967)

Glossary

spume froth, foam
trick a turn of duty steering the ship
vagrant wandering, homeless
yarn story

1 Which phrases are repeated in every verse? What is the effect of this repetition?

2 marks

2 Give an example of personification in the first verse.

1 mark

3 What does the speaker mean by a 'tall' ship?

1 mark

4 Which phrase tells you what helped sailors to navigate at sea?

1 mark

5 In the speaker's imagination, what signs of the wind are visible?

2 marks

6 If a knife is 'whetted' it is (ring one):

dampened oiled sharpened unsheathed.

1 mark

7 Although the speaker talks of 'the lonely sea', the poem suggests that he might have company on the voyage. Which two lines suggest that he will not be setting sail alone?

2 marks

8 Give two examples of sounds referred to in the poem.

2 marks

Review

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