

Directions: In assigned small groups of one or two students, you will read, annotate, and paraphrase the poem—Circle words you don't know and look them up...compare/contrast the original to the translation...paraphrase every stanza in the right column. Look for and label figurative language...try to find three to five different examples. At the end, summarize the poem. Be prepared to share with the larger group. (10 pts.)

Names: _____ Period: _____

Background: A friend of Burns explains how he came to immortalize a lowly field mouse: "This beautiful poem was imagined while the poet was holding the plough, on the farm of Mossgiel: the field is still pointed out, and a man called Blane is still living, who says he was guardsman to the bard at the time, and chased the mouse with the plough-pettle, for which he was rebuked by his young master, who inquired what harm the poor mouse had done him. In the night that followed, Burns awoke his guardsman and recited the poem as it now stands, and said, 'What think you of our mouse now?'"

To a Mouse

by Robert Burns

Modern English translation by Michael R. Burch

Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim'rous beastie,
O, what 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!

Sleek, tiny, timorous, cowering beast,
why's such panic in your breast?
Why dash away, so quick, so rash,
in a frenzied flash
when I would be loath to run after you
with a murderous plowstaff!

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'm truly sorry Man's dominion
has broken Nature's social union,
and justifies that bad opinion
which makes you startle,
when I'm your poor, earth-born companion
and 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,

I have no doubt you sometimes thieve;
What of it, friend? You too must live!
A random corn-ear in a shock's
a small behest; it-
'll give me a blessing to know such a loss;

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!

I'll never miss it!

Your tiny house lies in a ruin,
Its fragile walls wind-rent and strewn!
Now nothing's left to construct you a new one
of mosses green
since bleak December's winds, ensuing,
blow fast and keen!

You saw your fields laid bare and waste
with weary winter closing fast,
and cozy here, beneath the blast,
you thought to dwell,
till crash! the cruel iron ploughshare passed
straight through your cell!

That flimsy heap of leaves and stubble
had cost you many a weary nibble!
Now you're turned out, for all your trouble,
less house and hold,
to endure cold winter's icy dribble
and hoarfrosts cold!

But mouse-friend, you are not alone
in proving foresight may be vain:
the best-laid schemes of Mice and Men
go oft awry,
and leave us only grief and pain,
for promised joy!

Still, friend, you're blessed compared with me!
Only present dangers make you flee:
But, ouch!, behind me I can see
grim prospects drear!
While forward-looking seers, we
humans guess and fear!