

The Alchemist

ABOUT THE POEM

The poem written by Gareth Owen is about an alchemist. An alchemist was a person who turned metal into gold. Often, he was perceived as a magician or a sorcerer or wizard. So, all the superstitions about a wizard or a wicked sorcerer were attached to him too. In the five stanzas, the poet tells us about what everyone believes about the alchemist.

People see a light burning in a house all through the night. So, they think an alchemist lives there and he has books full of magic spells and like a wizard he has a cat. Others imagine that he has claws and a beak like a bird of prey and keeps rats, vampire bats and a talking raven for company. Children are afraid to go to his house or even to peep in. So, they dare each other to go up to his house and knock on it as a prank. And, a superstition has grown around his house that whoever has gone into his house, never comes out.

Children play nearby daring each other to peer in or knock on his windowpane. That is frightening enough; going into his house is out of question. They have heard so many rumours and stories about his house which are strange and scary: if anyone enters his house, they are never seen again; his furnace turns iron and bronze into gold ingots; he makes a powder which makes you never grow old or all sick if you eat it; some people say that he eats toads for tea, so, the poet scared to go there for fear he will be eaten by the alchemist. He is not sure if this strange person is a wizard or a saint.

READ AND DISCOVER

- ▶ Read aloud the poem correctly.
- ▶ Explain the poem as given above. Words and phrases can be explained, e.g., a mysterious light; books of spells; furnace; saint, etc.
- ▶ Divide the class into five groups—each group will learn one stanza and recite the poem. Correct them wherever necessary.

Outcome: Reciting and enjoying, and understanding the poem.

ENJOY AND UNDERSTAND

Exercise A: Ask one question at a time. Instruct the students to reply orally in complete sentences.

Exercises B, C and D: Ask the students to do these exercises on their own. The teacher can announce the correct answers aloud. Students can check their own answers and correct them.