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**(COMPULSORY ENGLISH)**

**UNIT 1: POETRY**

**Lord Tennyson : *Break, Break, Break***

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***Break, Break, Break***

Lord Alfred Tennyson

Break, break, break,

    On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!

And I would that my tongue could utter

    The thoughts that arise in me.

O, well for the fisherman's boy,

    That he shouts with his sister at play!

O, well for the sailor lad,

    That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on

    To their haven under the hill;

But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,

    And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break

    At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!

But the tender grace of a day that is dead

    Will never come back to me.



**The poet:**

**Lord Alfred Tennyson** (1809–92) was the **Poet Laureate** of Great Britain and Ireland during Queen Victoria's reign and remains one of the most important British poets. Tennyson's poems cover a wide range of subjects, ranging from medieval legends to classical myths and from domestic situations to nature. *Break, Break, Break* is a short poem that depicts personal sorrow against the backdrop of an ocean scene.



Tennyson was born in Somersby, Lincolnshire, England, into a middle-class family. His father, George Tennyson was an Anglican clergyman and his mother, Elizabeth. Tennyson and two of his elder brothers started writing poetry in their teens and a collection of poems by all three was published locally as *Poems by Two Brothers* in 1827. They were sent to the local grammar school where Alfred was unhappy and he left in 1820. Though home conditions were difficult, his father managed to give him a wide literary education.

In 1827 Alfred joined Trinity College, Cambridge. There he made friends with **Arthur Hallam**, an English poet, the son of historian Henry Hallam. This was the most significant friendship of Tennyson's life. The friends became members of the 'Apostles', an undergraduate club of intellectuals. Tennyson won the chancellor's gold medal with his poem, *Timbuctoo* in Cambridge. When his father died in 1831 with debts, he had to leave Cambridge without taking a degree.



During the Christmas holidays, Hallam visited Tennyson's home in Lincolnshire and became engaged to Tennyson's sister, Emilia Tennyson. In 1833 Hallam died suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of twenty-two due to a stroke while on a holiday in Vienna. Hallam's death had a profound effect on Tennyson and inspired several poems.

Tennyson published the two volume *Poems* (1842) which was an immediate success; poems from this collection, such as *Locksley Hall*, ***Break, Break, Break***, and *Ulysses*, and a new version of *The Lady of Shalott*. In 1850 Tennyson published his masterpiece, *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, dedicated to Hallam. In the same year, he was appointed Poet Laureate, succeeding William Wordsworth.

Tennyson expresses the spirit of the Victorian era in his poetry. Even in his personal poem when he expresses his joys and sorrows, he reflects his age and its chief characteristics.



~ **Farringford House** – Alfred Tennyson lived here from 1853 until his death ~

**Poem:**

Tennyson wrote *Break, Break, Break* in **1835** and **published it in 1842**. The poem is an **elegy** that describes Tennyson's feelings of loss after the death of his friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, and his feelings of loneliness at **Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire (England)**. In the poem, Tennyson explores the themes of **death, nature and change** while standing on the rocky sea shore.



In the **first stanza** of the poem the speaker talks directly to the sea waves. He addresses the waves and asks them to continue crashing (breaking) against the cold, gray, rocky shore. The 'cold' winter season and the colour 'gray' represent his sadness. He wishes to express his feelings but is unable to do so. His emotions may be complex or perhaps too dark or too personal to express them.

As he looks over the water he sees two different scenes close by. A fisherman's boy is shouting and playing with his sister. In the bay, a young sailor sings as he sails by. Normal life goes on all around the speaker, while he mourns the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam, in silence. The joy of the children and the sailor contrasts with the speaker's sorrowful mood.

The speaker also sees the stately ships (grand / splendid) sailing away into the distance. Perhaps they are sailing to safety, a shelter (haven) under the hills. Unfortunately, all these sights cannot

distract the speaker from the sorrow he feels. He misses the touch of his friend's "vanish'd hand" and his voice that is now still (silent). Tennyson remembers his close friend, Arthur Hallam, who died before this poem was written. No matter what the speaker does, he is haunted by the memories of the friend he lost.

The **final stanza** is a repetition of the first stanza – "cold gray stones" is changed to "foot of thy crags". Crags are steep rocks. The speaker tells the waves again to continue breaking against the rocky shore. Despite the sights the speaker sees all around, the people and the beautiful nature, he cannot get back to the peaceful happy days – "grace of a day" – that happened before the death of his friend. Things are different after the death of Arthur Hallam and the past "Will never come back to [him]". The lines emphasize that the speaker will never be happy again.



**Short Questions:**

1. Who is the poet of *Break, Break, Break*?  
Lord Alfred Tennyson is the poet of *Break, Break, Break*.
2. To which age does Lord Tennyson belong?  
Lord Tennyson belonged to the Victorian age (mid-19<sup>th</sup> century).
3. Whose death is commemorated in *Break, Break, Break*?  
The death of the English poet, Arthur Hallam is commemorated in *Break, Break, Break*.
4. What type of poem is Tennyson's *Break, Break, Break*?  
Tennyson's *Break, Break, Break* is an elegy that mourns the dead.
5. What is an elegy?  
An elegy is a poem that mourns the death of a person.
6. Why is the word 'Break' repeated in the title of Tennyson's poem?  
The repetition of 'break' in the title symbolizes time or eternity as the waves continue breaking on the shore, no matter what tragedy befalls an individual.
7. Where was the speaker present in *Break, Break, Break*?  
The speaker was present in a rocky sea shore in *Break, Break, Break* - at Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire (England).
8. Who is addressed by the speaker in the first line of the poem?  
The speaker addresses the sea waves in the first line of the poem.
9. How does the speaker describe the shore in *Break, Break, Break*?  
The speaker describes the shore as cold, gray, rocky in *Break, Break, Break*.
10. How does the speaker describe the waves in *Break, Break, Break*?  
The speaker describes the waves as crashing (breaking) against the cold, gray, rocky shore.
11. What does 'break, break, break' suggest in Tennyson's poem?  
The repetition 'break, break, break' suggests that the poet repeatedly asks the sea waves to break or crash against the rocky shore.
12. What is the speaker unable to do in *Break, Break, Break*?  
The speaker is unable to express his sorrow in the poem, *Break, Break, Break*.

13. What does the sea symbolize in *Break, Break, Break*?  
The sea in *Break, Break, Break* symbolizes time or eternity as the waves continue breaking on the shore, no matter what tragedy befalls an individual.
14. What is the fisherman's boy doing in *Break, Break, Break*?  
The fisherman's boy is shouting in joy and playing with his sister.
15. What is the young sailor doing in *Break, Break, Break*?  
In the bay, a young sailor sings a song as he sails by.
16. How does the speaker describe the ships in *Break, Break, Break*?  
The speaker describes the ships in *Break, Break, Break* as 'stately' or grand.
17. Where are the ships sailing to in *Break, Break, Break*?  
In *Break, Break, Break* the stately ships are sailing to a haven or a safe place under the hill.
18. What has remained unchanged according to the speaker in *Break, Break, Break*?  
According to the speaker in *Break, Break, Break*, the scenes of normal life have remained unchanged.
19. What change has taken place in the life of the poet before writing *Break, Break, Break*?  
The death of Arthur Hallam affected Lord Tennyson deeply as he misses his friend; he cannot hold his hand or hear his voice anymore.
20. Whose death is mourned by Tennyson in the elegy *Break, Break, Break*?  
The death of the English poet, Arthur Hallam, is mourned by Tennyson in the elegy *Break, Break, Break*.
21. Who or what will never come back to the speaker in *Break, Break, Break*?  
The happy days of the past will never come back to the speaker as his friend, Arthur Hallam, was no more.
22. What is referred to as "vanish'd hand, / And the sound of a voice that is still"?  
The speaker refers to his dead friend, Arthur Hallam's hand as vanished and his voice as still.
23. How does *Break, Break, Break* show that life goes on despite personal sorrow?  
*Break, Break, Break* shows that life goes on through children playing, a young man singing and ships sailing while the speaker mourns his friend, Arthur Hallam's death in silence.



24. What is the poet's mood in *Break, Break, Break*?

The poet's mood is sorrowful in *Break, Break, Break* as he tries to accept the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam.

25. What is the verse pattern of *Break, Break, Break*?

Tennyson's *Break, Break, Break* is written in blank verse.