

# 3. Ode to a Butterfly

Animals and Plants

## Learning Outcomes

- ▶ read the poem aloud with fluency and expressions
- ▶ learn new words and infer their meanings
- ▶ draw from personal experiences or real-life situations
- ▶ learn about imagery
- ▶ learn about phrases
- ▶ write an informal letter



### Digital Desk



### Warm up



What is the most beautiful thing you have seen in nature? Describe it in class. Try to paint as vivid a picture as you can using only words.



The life cycle of a butterfly is well known. On an average, most species of butterflies have a lifespan of two weeks, but some live for up to nine months or even a year. Butterflies are cold-blooded, which means that they cannot regulate their own body temperature. When it gets too cold, they cannot fly until they have warmed themselves up. This is why butterflies can sometimes be seen perched on a rock or a blade of grass with their wings spread out. When it gets too warm, butterflies cool themselves off by resting in the shade.

**Cross-curricular Connection**



Read this ode to the butterfly, one of nature's daintiest and prettiest creatures.



Thou spark of life that waviest wings of gold,  
Thou songless wanderer mid the songful birds,  
With Nature's secrets in thy tints unrolled  
Through gorgeous cipher, past the reach of words,  
Yet dear to every child  
In glad pursuit beguiled,  
Living his unspoiled days mid flowers and flocks and herds!

Thou winged blossom, liberated thing,  
What secret tie binds thee to other flowers,  
Still held within the garden's fostering?  
Will they too soar with the completed hours,  
Take flight, and be like thee  
Irrevocably free,  
Hovering at will o'er their parental bowers?

Or is thy luster drawn from heavenly hues, -  
A sumptuous drifting fragment of the sky,  
Caught when the sunset its last glance imbues  
With sudden splendor, and the tree-tops high  
Grasp that swift blazonry,  
Then lend those tints to thee,  
On thee to float a few short hours, and die?

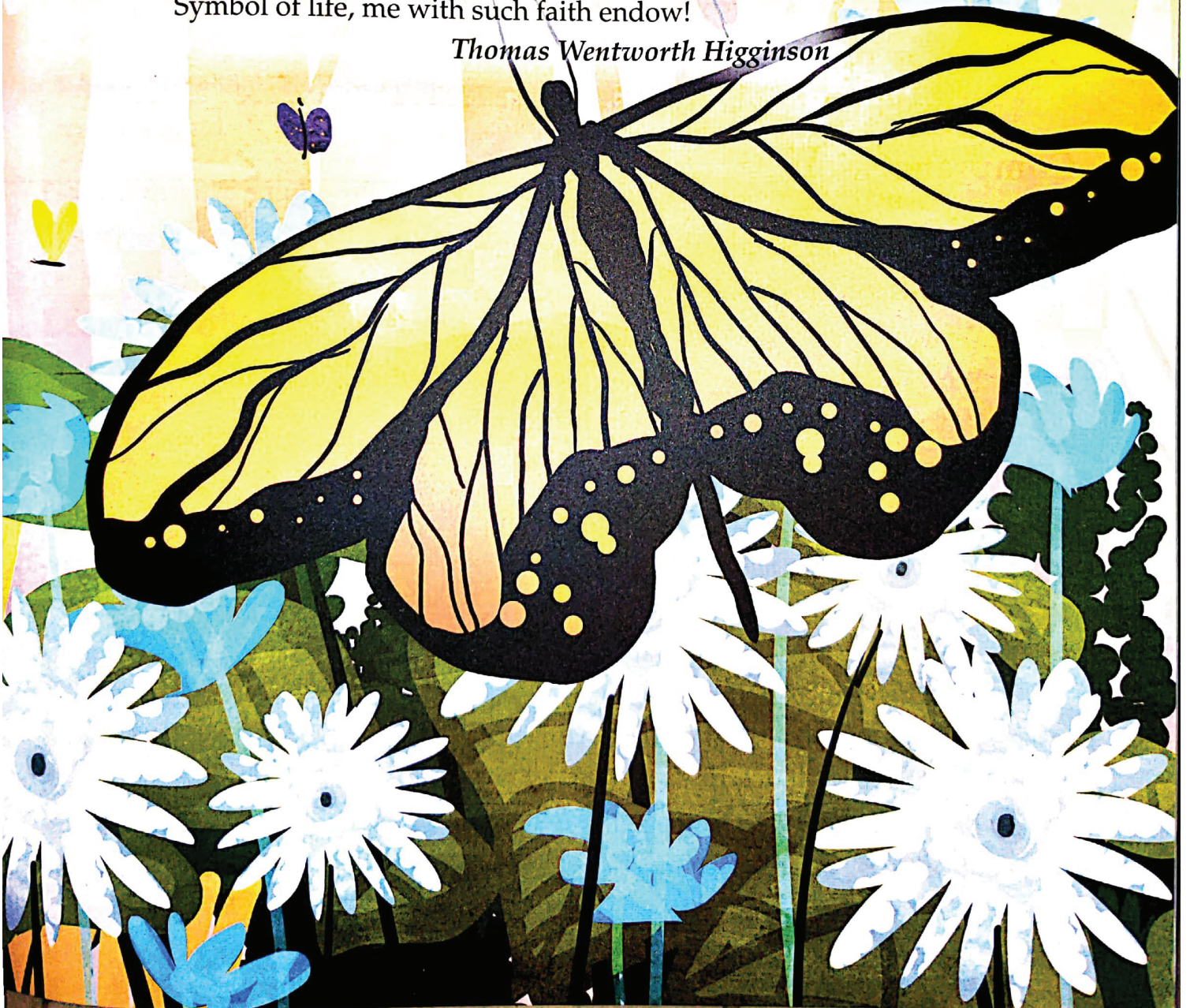
Birds have their nests; they rear their eager young,  
And flit on errands all the livelong day;  
Each fieldmouse keeps the homestead whence it sprung;  
But thou art Nature's freeman, -free to stray  
Unfettered through the wood,  
Seeking thine airy food,  
The sweetness spiced on every blossomed spray.



The garden one wide banquet spreads for thee,  
O daintiest reveller of the joyous earth!  
One drop of honey gives satiety;  
A second draught would drug thee past all mirth.  
Thy feast no **orgy** shows;  
Thy calm eyes never close,  
Thou soberest sprite to which the sun gives birth.

And yet the soul of man upon thy wings  
Forever soars in aspiration; thou  
His emblem of the new career that springs  
When death's arrest bids all his spirit bow.  
He seeks his hope in thee  
Of immortality.  
Symbol of life, me with such faith endow!

*Thomas Wentworth Higginson*





**thou:** (*archaic*) you  
**thy:** (*archaic*) your  
**tints:** shades of colour  
**cipher:** a secret code  
**beguiled:** attracted by  
**fostering:** (*here*) caring for something and providing food and shelter  
**thee:** (*archaic*) your  
**luster:** shine  
**sumptuous:** impressive

**blazonry:** (*archaic*) colourful decoration or display  
**whence:** (*archaic*) from where  
**freeman:** (*archaic*) a person who has been given the freedom of a particular area as a reward for the work that he/she has done  
**reveller:** a person who is having fun in a noisy and lively manner  
**orgy:** a party



### About the Author

**Thomas Wentworth Higginson** (1823–1911) was an American minister, author, abolitionist and soldier. He participated in the American Civil War and was active in the abolitionist movement, which was against the practice of slavery. He was known to be not only against slavery, but also supported labour rights and women's rights. Most of his writings were done after the Civil War and are mainly focused on nature, art and human existence.



## Comprehension

### A. Answer these questions.

1. What is the 'spark of life'?
2. What makes the butterfly different from the birds?
3. What does the speaker imagine the flowers might also do?
4. Where does the butterfly get its lustre from?
5. What does man seek in the butterfly?

### B. Answer these questions with reference to the context.

1. *Will they too soar with the completed hours,  
Take flight, and be like thee*
  - a. Who are 'they' in the first line?
  - b. Who is 'thee' in the second line?
  - c. Why does the speaker use the word 'soar' here?  
What does it describe?
2. *But thou art Nature's freeman, -free to stray*
  - a. Who is Nature's freeman?





- b. What activity is the speaker describing here?  
c. What other animals does the speaker compare the butterfly to?

### C. Think and answer.

1. What does the speaker feel about the butterfly? What does he say human beings see in the butterfly? Explain the message of the poem in your own words.
2. Around the world, people believe butterflies to be the representation of life, hope and freedom. Do you believe that hope and freedom are very important in one's life? Give examples to support your answer.



## Word Wonder

You have already learnt what an imagery is. For instance, the phrase 'a sumptuous drifting fragment of the sky' is used to describe the butterfly. It gives the reader a clear sense of the vividness of the colour of the butterfly.

**Imagery** in poetry or prose is the use of language to create vivid pictures in the reader's mind.

**Pick out three examples of imagery from the poem that appeal to any of the five senses.**

## Learn About Language

Read these sentences.

- ▶ **In a certain department**, there was a certain official.
- ▶ **On reaching home**, he sat down at once **at the table**.

Each set of highlighted groups of words in these sentences is a **phrase**.

**A phrase** is a set of words that does not contain a subject or a verb.

**Underline the phrases in these sentences.**


1. The potato curry was rather tasty.
2. Reema has bought the house with her life's savings.
3. The spotted dog was sleeping on the carpet.
4. Mrs Malhotra followed the track through the jungle.
5. One of my friends is a great chess player.





6. The expensive hotel was fully booked.
7. Our grandmother took a nap for an hour.
8. The table of teak wood is mine.


## Language Lab

-  A. Listen to a few stanzas from the poem 'Great, Wide, Beautiful, Wonderful World'. Now, fill in the blanks with rhyming words.

Great, wide, beautiful, wonderful World,  
With the wonderful water round you \_\_\_\_\_,  
And the wonderful grass upon your breast—  
World, you are beautifully \_\_\_\_\_.

The wonderful air is over me,  
And the wonderful wind is shaking the \_\_\_\_\_,  
It walks on the water, and whirls the mills,  
And talks to itself on the tops of the \_\_\_\_\_.

You friendly Earth! how far do you go,  
With the wheat-fields that nod and the rivers that \_\_\_\_\_,  
With cities and gardens, and cliffs and isles,  
And people upon you for thousands of \_\_\_\_\_?

-  B. Work in pairs. Do some research and find out about different species of butterflies in the country. Then, take turns and talk about them in the class.

## Composition

You have already learnt that an **informal letter** is written in a friendly and casual way to communicate with friends and family. Such a letter may include family news, an update on how the writer is doing, a description of sports or club activities that the writer is participating in as well as appropriate enquiries as to the recipient of the letter.





Write an informal letter on any one of the given situations.

1. Write a letter to a friend who is setting off for another place. Tell him/her about something interesting that has happened to you.
2. Write a letter to your younger brother who is going to appear for his board examinations telling him how to go about his studies.

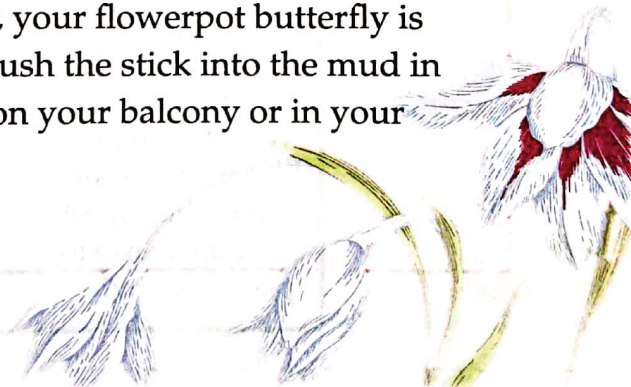


## Activity

Make some butterfly decorations for your balcony or garden, that might attract real butterflies.



First, paint the sticks using a bright colour, or a combination of bright colours. Set them aside to dry. Then, using the chart paper and the paint, draw a butterfly and colour it. It should be large, about the size of your hand or slightly bigger. Cut around the outline with a pair of scissors. After that, use the glue to stick your butterfly onto the painted stick. Finally, your flowerpot butterfly is ready! Just push the stick into the mud in a flowerpot on your balcony or in your garden.



**Further Reading:** *The Afternoon Landscape* by Thomas Wentworth Higginson

