

W.H. Auden  
Unknown Citizen  
More challenging questions!

Worksheet by:  
Keith Tankard  
Knowledge4Africa.com

Wystan Hugh Auden is regarded by many as the most influential poet of the 20th century, a man who inspired other giants of the poetic world such as Cecil Day-Lewis, Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender.

He was born in 1907 in York, the son of a medical practitioner and a university-educated mother. He attended Oxford University where he graduated in 1928 with a lowly 3rd class degree in Literature. While at Oxford, he became known for his poetry and his eccentricities and, most notably, for his series of homosexual relationships.

Auden became a schoolmaster, which later allowed T.S. Eliot to criticise him for allowing his pedantic teaching style to influence his poetry. In 1935 he married Erika Mann, a German lesbian who needed to escape from Germany. The marriage was one of convenience, designed purely to provide her with British citizenship.

During the 1930s Auden became captivated with left-wing politics and social causes, although he would later tire of the contradictions inherent in this. Eventually he would claim that politics and art could never be combined. In January 1939, shortly before the outbreak of war, he sailed for New York. Because this was seen as desertion from his homeland which was about to be embroiled in conflict, he lost much of his reputation in England. As a result, he settled in the United States and eventually took out citizenship there.

While living in America, he established a permanent relationship with the 18 year old poet, Chester Kallman, who would become his lifelong companion. Auden would lecture literature at several universities, including Oxford where his tenure demanded that he give only three lectures per year. He would die in Vienna in 1973, shortly after delivering a guest lecture.

- 
1. Comment on the title of the poem, and on the subtitle. (4)
  2. What is the overall TONE of this poem? Explain why you come to that conclusion? (4)
  3. The poet asks, "Was he free? Was he happy?"
    - Would the answer to these questions be "Yes" or "No"? Explain why you think this. (4)
  4. If "frigidaire" is the name of a refrigerator, why is it not spelt with a capital letter? (4)
  5. This poem is a social satire. Be able to explain why this is so. (4)
  6. Can you think of any logical reason for the poet using the very strange rhyming scheme found in this poem? (4)

<[www.knowledge4africa.com](http://www.knowledge4africa.com)>

**This worksheet is copyrighted. No part of it may be copied or printed in any form whatever without the express permission in writing of the author. The sole exception is for non-profit educational purposes.**