

John Masefield (1878-1967) was a very productive poet, novelist and dramatist. At 13 he was a trainee on a ship and this experience had a large influence on his writing. He travelled around the world and held many jobs which also gave him an interest in the lives of ordinary men. In his early poetry Masefield was greatly influenced by the Irish poet Yeats and his poems are characterized by a fluent rhythmic vitality.

John Masefield

Sea-Fever (1902)

tall ship *sb* sejlskib
wheel *sb* ro
dawn *sb* dagry
tide *sb* tidevand
spray *sb* skumsprøjt
spume *sb* skum
sea-gull *sb* måge
vagrant *adj* omstrejfende
gypsy *sb* sigøjner
whetted *adj* hvæstet
merry *adj* lystig
yarn *sb* fortælling
rover *sb* vandringsmand
trick *sb* tårn

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face and a grey dawn breaking.

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I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.

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I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's like a whetted
knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

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Pre-reading

Life at sea and ships in general seem to hold a universal attraction. Take a walk down the local harbour or make a search on the Internet and find a ship that fascinates you. Make a short oral presentation for the class in which you explain why you find this particular ship appealing. To make your own presentation ap-

pealing and interesting use as many maritime adjectives, words and expressions as you can. You may use power point to support you presentation.

Analysis and Interpretation

1. Make a paraphrase of the poem.
2. How does Masefield use rhyme and rhythm? Look also for examples of assonance and alliteration.
3. Find examples of repetition in the poem and discuss the effect it has on the mood of the poem.
4. Find words and phrases that express movement. What is the effect of this?
5. How does the poet describe life on a ship out at sea?
6. Why does the poet long for this kind of life?
7. Discuss the title of the poem.

Post-reading

1. Using your dictionary, look up the different words for ships in the following list. Explain how the ships are different. Ship, boat, vessel, craft, steamer, ferry, liner, packet, brig, cutter, skiff, pram, pleasure-boat, raft.
2. You are about to embark on a sailing trip. Work in groups and start by deciding where you are going. Then discuss for how long you are going, what is the price of the voyage, what do you need to bring along (food, clothing, special equipment, etc).
3. Using the poem, write an essay in which you discuss the attractions of sailing. Your essay should be about 150-200 words.
4. Imagine that you are the captain of a ship circumnavigating the world. Write 5 entries in the captain's diary describing a particularly scary or exciting or funny incident.