

The Listeners

Questions for Book 4 Group

1. Although we don't know the Traveller's real name, why might the word traveller have a capital letter in the poem?
The capital letter is used as if Traveller is his proper name, like a proper noun - it might suggest how important he is compared to other travellers, and it also gives this person huge importance in the context of this poem.
2. Find and copy the great triple alliteration in the first ten lines - what is it?
The alliteration is 'forest's ferny floor'
3. 'But only a host of phantom listeners...' - what does this mean?
Phantom listeners suggest there are ghostly listeners in the house, or phantom could be used to describe unseen, listeners.
4. It says they stood **'thronging... on the stair'** - explain what this could mean in this poem(you may need to look up the definition of thronging).
Thronging is related to crowds, and crowding around, so in the poem so it says the phantom listeners are crowded together on the staircase.
5. Explain in your own words what the Traveller's horse was doing after he called into the house; don't just copy the line out.
The horse was cropping the turf, which means it was cutting the grass off the top of the lawn and eating it.
6. The poem uses a very unusual word - smote- which we rarely see used. Find out what it means and find the present tense of 'smote'.
'Smote' means to strike or hit sharply or heavily with the hand or something in the hand. It is the past tense of the word 'smite'.
7. Find and copy the great triple alliteration in the last ten lines - what is it?
The alliteration is 'silence surged softly'.

8. Is there a pattern in this poem? If there is, how would you describe it?
All the even number lines in the poem rhyme.
9. Challenge Question: Lots of people have commented on what they think this poem is actually about. Write a brief summary of what you feel the real story is. Why is the man there? Why does he get no answer? Is there someone in the house or not- and why don't they answer?
10. Challenge Question: It has been said that this poem is a metaphor for man's attempts to contact extra-terrestrial life in the universe. Can you explain how the ideas in this poem could suggest this?
11. Background Research: The search for extra-terrestrial life project on earth is called SETI; can you write a few lines about what this is and what they do?