

Poem inspired by the King James Bible

Introduction

- Watch a 2 minute clip of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. (Chapter 24 at 1 minute 32 seconds)
- Ask pupils what the Philosopher's stone might be.
- Explain that for centuries people had been searching for a stone that would turn ordinary metal into gold. Another name for the Philosopher's stone was 'The Elixir.'
- Talk about the word 'Elixir' and its meaning. A medicine that claimed to cure all was often called 'An Elixir'. Often quack doctors sold 'Elixirs' that claimed to cure everything. Try advertising your own 'Elixir', you can bring in a bottle of water tinted with fruit squash. One advert is on the **presentation**

Give pupils their own bottle of water tinted with squash. They can make up a name for it, including the word 'Elixir, and a list of all the things it will cure. Alternatively, use **Bottle** to write on.

Core material

Select from the following activities:

1. Listen to the poem

Listen to this poem set to music at

www.cyberhymnal.org/mid/s/a/n/sandys2.mid

Pupils might want to see or listen to some other verses.

www.ccel.org/ccel/herbert/temple/Elixir.htm

Mrs Coren's Cure-all Elixir

Do you ache when you get up in the morning?
Is your throat sore and your nose blocked?
Do you cough and sneeze?
Don't despair!
One teaspoon of Mrs Coren's Cure-all Elixir
will cure all your aches and pains.

Extract From *The Elixir* by George Herbert

The Christian belief that what is done to others God counts as done to him.

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things thee to see,
And what I do in any thing,
To do it as for thee:

It's the attitude that counts.

This attitude turns hard and boring work into something 'divine'.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.

The clause is 'For thy sake', doing everything as if doing it for God'.

This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold:
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.

This attitude is that the Philosopher's stone or the Elixir turns the ordinary into the precious.

If work or service to others is done as if serving God, people can never say 'I'm just (add job) . . . If it is service to God it is reckoned as valuable. The word told here means 'reckoned'.

2. Explore the poem using *Elixir presentation*

- Explore the title. The word 'elixir' has a number of meanings:
 - A potion that cures people
 - An important principle
 - Something that could turn ordinary metal to gold (also known as the 'Philosophers stone'). In Herbert's day many people were searching for this particular 'elixir'.

- Explore any old or difficult words before you roll over words and see the explanations. (The words of the poem and the explanations are printed in full at the end of these notes.)
- Pupils may have their own ideas about the meaning of words. Ask pupils to frame questions to ask about the poem. Some you may be able to answer from the teacher's background notes; others may

need some research. Some websites are given at the end.

For Herbert, the Philosopher's stone, the Elixir' was an attitude. He summed up the attitude in the words 'For thy sake' (For God's sake). That is, all things were done as if they were done to God. In what ways can an attitude be the 'Philosopher's stone' or an 'Elixir?' What changes would such an attitude bring about?

A story that shows how an attitude changes things:

Day after day, after day, two stone cutters cut blocks of stone. It was boring, back breaking work. When asked what they were doing the first one said, 'Cutting stone.' The second one replied, 'Building a cathedral'. Same job, different attitude.

3. Annotate the poem

Using the printed version of the poem, pupils can add notes around it explaining difficult words and ideas and how the Bible influenced this poem.

Below are some of the verses from the Bible that might have influenced this poem. Each quotation encourages an attitude of seeing work or doing good to others as serving God. Christians believe that God accepts service to another human being as service to himself. As an Anglican (Church of England) vicar, Herbert would have read the King James Bible

regularly. These quotations are on the **presentation**. If you roll over the symbol the modern paraphrase will appear.

Quotations for the King James Bible, a modern paraphrase is in brackets:

'With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.' Ephesians 6:7
(Serve and work willingly as if you are serving God)

'I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Matthew 25:40
(Whatever you do to others, even the least important, you do to me)

He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD Proverbs 19:17
(Anyone who gives to the poor gives to God)

Reflection

What attitude would they call an Elixir? Give pupils a template of a bottle and ask them to fill it with words that describe an attitude that changes life for the better for everyone. For example, gratitude.

They can decorate their bottle and create advertising for it.