



## ***Kubla Khan* – Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

### **Teacher Notes**

This is a proposed couple of lessons [probably] to engage students in the reading and enjoyment of a famous visionary poem and then write a similar one for themselves.

Its focus is not on any particular ideas but in taking the theme of *Vision* about being as creative as possible in thought and writing.

### **Exploring**

However a classroom presentation/lesson is organised – white board/projection/individual copies – the start is to read and/or hear the poem *Kubla Khan* read.

There is a copy of the poem provided as one of the resources.

Here are two YouTube readings:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hfrx\\_JQcIsI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hfrx_JQcIsI) Narrated by Benedict Cumberbatch [rather unimaginative visuals though]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8mqHCgVdZc> Narrated by Tom O’Bedlam. Strong ‘traditional’ reading.

Neither is brilliant, and there is a dearth of alternatives!

### **One – *Vision* Map First**

The student sheet is probably self-explanatory. Group work would be the most sensible and useful, and using a poem sheet on a poster-size paper/card would give the space to circle content and write Qs and As.

## Two – Vision Map Second

Obvious words/detail/lines for researching are:

*Xanadu/Kubla Khan* – exotic names as much as real

*pleasure-dome* – place of fun

*Alph* – there are rivers with this name/part-name; exotic

*caverns measureless to man* – that question of why measureless?

*sunless sea* – obviously weather, but perhaps why this can't reflect back light?

*girdled round* – twisted/controlled?

*sinuous rills* – shape/sound – sound as poetic device, but don't overstate

*incense-bearing tree* – from the bark/exotic/have some fun with this...

*romantic chasm* – not as in love! fanciful...

*savage place* – darkness introduced in poem/wildness/native

*holy and enchanted* – idea of special/magical

*woman wailing* – emotion/strong emotion; there is the alliteration, but avoid

*demon-lover* – probably best to avoid idea of devil? sense of evil though, but again as 'lover' is complex territory

*earth in fast thick pants were breathing* – well, pants as breaths!

*chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail* – agricultural metaphor most wouldn't know; idea of separation/separating

*dancing rocks* – magical idea

*mazy motion* – imagery/shape, rather than alliteration [student writers get bogged down if incorporating, like rhyme – it doesn't tend to help writing process]

*Ancestral voices prophesying war* – mythological notion; war as danger, that dark side – this is STC being dramatic!

*It was a miracle of rare device* – the miraculous

*A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice* – power of the paradoxical image

*damself with a dulcimer* – folklore/pastoral

*Abyssinian maid* – promises paradise/temptress?

*Mount Abora* – mythical place, sounds exotic: these three refs as part of that exotic, myth-making spirit of the poem

*Beware! Beware!* – drama/melodramatic

*His flashing eyes, his floating hair!* – continuing of the dramatic, monster image

*Weave a circle round him thrice* – witch-like/spells

*And close your eyes with holy dread* – evil, again

*For he on honey-dew hath fed*

*And drunk the milk of Paradise* – perhaps drunk ON paradise is best way to use – as the whole visionary imagination of the piece

All of the above notes on quotes are NOT meant as answers! These have been done to help with ideas for feeding back to students with questions.

These notes focus as much as possible on the mystical, exotic, dramatic, exaggerated, creative aspects of the content of the poem. Where there are poetic devices at play, they are in

many ways best avoided: when students try to emulate such, the writing gets logged into these techniques rather than the mystery of their own visionary storytelling...

### ***Vision Writing***

This is all about building up a list of lines/ideas to work from. As much as possible.

‘Stream of Consciousness’ can be a big ask if never attempted before, but encouraging a free flow of thoughts is crucial. Students often want to get it all ‘correct’ at a first go! Make sure they know this is not the case.

It is important writers know there are no mistakes [at any point in the process] but especially here when it is rather random.

The more they write, the more they can shape it and edit it afterwards.

Make a game of it – have timed spurts of continuous writing. Perhaps this will depend on the age of the student writers.

### ***Vision List Poem***

List poems provide a structure that isn’t complex. Its repetitiveness can add power to the narrative. *Kubla Khan* is a list poem – more complexly listed [!] but in essence it is one visionary piece of detail after another, on and on as the recalled vision/dream is remembered.

Coleridge has some skill in making his sound rather elaborate and refined, but the process has similarities with a more ostensible list poem.

The model provided encourages repetition by using it obviously. A list poem doesn’t need a stanza structure, but this too can help organise little groupings of imaginary detail.

The *travelled to Kubla Khan* makes a place of the person, but that is the fun of playing around with the original.

If students want to more actively enter their poems, additions to the repetitions and other adjustments can achieve this:

*I have travelled to Kubla Khan  
where I saw the sky in its dome of purple and blue  
where I swam in rainbow rivers to flow forward forever  
where I watched horizons shift to the dancing move of hills  
where I too got lost in caverns measured by disappeared men*

More adventurous and experimental ideas would be to use a cut-up approach: writing complete lines and then literally cut into pieces and rearrange randomly [with working to make them fit grammatically]

*I have travelled to Kubla Khan  
where skies danced with the move of hills  
where rivers flowed upwards into domes of purple and blue  
where horizons were measured by disappearing men  
where caverns painted rainbows on their sides*

By all means write your own model – this can help you prepare better for presenting the idea!