

The Little Black Boy

by William Blake

*My mother bore me in the southern wild,
And I am black, but oh my soul is white!
White as an angel is the English child,
But I am black, as if bereaved of light.*

*My mother taught me underneath a tree,
And, sitting down before the heat of day,
She took me on her lap and kissed me,
And, pointed to the east, began to say:*

*"Look on the rising sun: there God does live,
And gives His light, and gives His heat away,
And flowers and trees and beasts and men
receive Comfort in morning, joy in the noonday.*

*"And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove."*



The Little Black Boy by William Blake ©The British Museum

Discussion Points

1. In this poem, Blake is thinking about the contrast between black and white. Underline the parts in which he talks about these colours.
2. How does he talk about these colours? Is black a good colour? What about white?
3. Why would modern readers be uncomfortable with the way that Blake talks about the Little Black Boy?
4. What is the message of this poem? Did Blake mean to be prejudiced?