

Robert Burns – A Biography

Robert Burns, also known as Rabbie Burns or the Ploughman Poet, was a famous poet and songwriter. He was born in Ayrshire, Scotland on the 25th January, 1759.

Young Burns

His father was a farmer, and Burns spent his childhood working on the farm. He had to work long, hard hours. This meant that he didn't spend much time at school. Even though his family was poor, his father made sure that Burns could read and write. When he wasn't working, Burns loved to listen to poetry and music. He also enjoyed listening to his mother sing old Scottish songs to him. Burns soon found out that he was very good at writing, and he wrote his first song at the age of fifteen. It was inspired by a farm servant named Nellie Kilpatrick.

Sudden Success

In 1786, Burns decided to publish some of his songs and poems. The first edition of his poetry was known as the Kilmarnock edition. It was a huge hit and sold out within a month. Burns suddenly became very popular and famous. He had planned to emigrate to Jamaica, but his sudden fame and success helped change his mind.

Instead, Burns decided to move to Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland. This was a very exciting time for him. He relished meeting the rich and important people who lived there. He also enjoyed going to parties. Burns had become a huge celebrity.

Whilst on a tour of the Highlands, Burns found a beautifully patterned agate stone. Once back home, he commissioned a Silversmith to make it into a cravat pin. This would have been a costly undertaking, and demonstrates just how rich and successful he had become.

Famous Songs and Poems

Burns is famous for rewriting 'Auld Lang Syne'. The song is sung by millions of people around the world, as they celebrate the end of one year and the start of the next. He enjoyed travelling around Scotland, collecting old songs and poems so that he could adapt and improve them. One evening, he overheard an old man sing the beginning of a song. Burns wrote the words down quickly before he could forget them. He went on to adapt and extend the song, which we now know as 'Auld Lang Syne'.

Burns was famous for writing from the heart. He believed that everyone should be treated equally, regardless of wealth or status. His compassion for others is evident in the poem 'To a mouse'. Whilst ploughing, Burns destroyed the nest of a mouse. Burns was upset by this because he knew the mouse would have worked hard to prepare himself for the cold winter ahead, and it had all been destroyed.

His Death

In 1788, Burns moved from Edinburgh to Dumfries due to poor health. Some think his health problems were because of the long, hard hours he had worked on the farm as a child. Robert Burns died on the 21st July 1796. He was only 37 years old. His wife, Jean Armour, gave birth to their youngest son, Maxwell Burns, on the day of his funeral.

Burns Night

Robert Burns became even more famous after his death. The 25th January is now known as Burns Night. Fans of the poet hold Burns Night suppers, where they listen to his poetry and songs. Scottish food, like haggis, neeps and tatties, is eaten too. Bagpipe music is played as the haggis is carried into the room. At more formal suppers, the highlight of the evening is the reading of 'Address to a Haggis' as the haggis is cut.

Text Marking

1. Draw a blue line around the opening statement.
2. Draw a green line around the sub-headings.
3. Underline the name (or nickname) of the poet/songwriter in red.
4. Underline dates and ages in purple.
5. Underline places in yellow.
6. Underline Burns's likes and beliefs in pink.
7. Draw a grey line around the name of his songs or poems.
8. Underline examples of anecdotes in orange.

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