

Travels with Charley

John Steinbeck, a highly respected, award-winning American author who died in 1968, drove through most American states in a camper van with his dog in 1960. His book *Travels with Charley* was the result.

I had never been to Wisconsin, but all my life I had heard about it, had eaten its cheeses, some of them as good as any in the world. And I must have seen pictures. Everyone must have. Why then was I unprepared for the beauty of this region, for its variety of field and hill, forest, lake? I think now I must have considered it one big level cow pasture because of the state's enormous yield of milk products. I never saw a country that changed so rapidly, and because I had not expected it everything I saw brought a delight. I don't know how it is in other seasons, the summer may reek and rock with heat, the winters may groan with dismal cold, but when I saw it for the first and only time in early October, the air was rich with butter-colored sunlight, not fuzzy but crisp and clear so that every frost-gay tree was set off, the rising hills were not compounded, but alone and separate. There was a penetration of the light into solid substance so that I seemed to see into things, deep in, and I've seen that kind of light elsewhere only in Greece. I remembered now that I had been told Wisconsin is a lovely state, but the telling had not prepared me. It was a magic day. The land dripped with richness, the fat cows and pigs gleaming against green, and, in the smaller holdings, corn standing in little tents as corn should, and pumpkins all about.

I don't know whether or not Wisconsin has a cheese-tasting festival, but I who am a lover of cheese believe it should. Cheese was everywhere, cheese centers, cheese cooperatives, cheese stores and stands, perhaps even cheese ice cream. I can believe anything, since I saw a score of signs advertising Swiss Cheese Candy. Now I can't persuade anyone that it exists, that I did not make it up.

From *Travels with Charley* by John Steinbeck (1980)

Exercise

1 What is Wisconsin's main farming activity and product?

(3)

2 List three words or phrases that indicate the author's positive reaction to Wisconsin.

(1)

3 What do you learn about the climate of Wisconsin from this passage?

(5)

4 What does the author mean by

(a) 'corn standing in little tents as corn should'

(3)

(b) 'perhaps even cheese ice cream'?

(3)

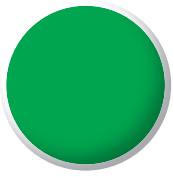
5 What surprises the author about Wisconsin?

(4)

6 Summarise what you learn about the state of Wisconsin from this passage.

(6)

Anything you quote – from a passage or poem of any sort – should be enclosed in inverted commas (sometimes called ‘quotation marks’).



The Lesson

Poet Edward Lucie-Smith was born in 1933. This poem looks back to his schooldays.

'Your father's gone,' my bald headmaster said.
His shiny dome and brown tobacco jar
Splintered at once in tears. It wasn't grief.
I cried for knowledge which was bitterer
Than any grief. For there and then I knew
That grief has uses – that a father dead
Could bind the bully's fist for a week or two;
And then I cried for shame, then for relief.

I was a month past ten when I heard this:
I still remember how the noise was stilled
In school-assembly when my grief came in.
Some goldfish in a bowl quietly sculled
Around their shining prison on its shelf.
They were indifferent. All the other eyes
Were turned towards me. Somewhere in myself
Pride, like a goldfish, flashed a sudden fin.

The Lesson by Edward Lucie-Smith (1961)

Exercise

1 How old is the narrator when his father dies?

_____ (1)

2 Who tells him the news and where?

_____ (3)

3 (a) What is the narrator's first thought when he hears the news?

(3)

(b) Why does he feel shame?

(3)

4 What does the poet mean by

(a) 'Splintered at once in tears'

(2)

(b) 'when my grief came in'?

(2)

5 What is the reaction of other pupils?

(5)

6 Why does he mention the goldfish?

(6)

When you answer questions about poetry, use your own words but weave short, even single-word, quotations from the poem into your sentences.