

Burns House Museum, Mauchline: Virtual Visit Lessons

Overview

In this lesson, the inspiration for Burns' writing is explored. Pupils are encouraged to think about changing attitudes in society in relation to Burns' life with Jean.

Background Information

- > Robert and his brother Gilbert worked on farms from an early age
- > The farms were never prosperous, so the family moved frequently
- > After farming at Mount Oliphant (1766-77), the Burnes farmed at Lochlea Farm (1777-84), then after Robert's father William died they farmed at Mossgiel Farm, near Mauchline (1784-88)
- > It was in the town of Mauchline Burns met Jean Armour, a local girl
- > At this time he began to write poetry seriously, inspired by Jean, his friends and the beauty of nature
- > Jean's family were not happy at her interest in Robert Burns and thought she could do better than a poor farmer and they sent her off to stay with relatives in Paisley
- > However Jean became pregnant out of wedlock with Robert's twins and soon after, her father tried to have Burns arrested
- > Angered by his reputation with Jean's family and distracted by dalliances with other women, Robert decided to travel to Jamaica to 'get away from it all'. To raise the fare, he was persuaded to publish his poems.
- > His poems were published in Kilmarnock in 1786 to great acclaim, making him an instant success. He decided to stay in Scotland after all!
- > Jean's father swallowed his pride and agreed to Robert and Jean's marriage, such was his success

Curricular Links

5-14 Environmental Studies (Levels C / D):

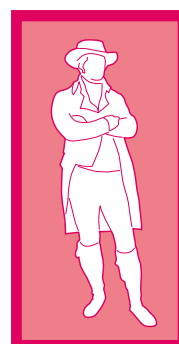
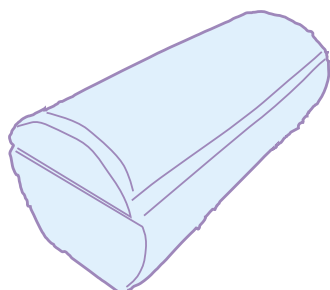
People in the Past – People events and societies of significance from the past

Change, continuity, cause and effect

Time and historical sequence

Nature of historical evidence

People in Society / Citizenship – Rules, Rights and Responsibilities in Society



Burns House Museum, Mauchline: Virtual Visit Lessons

Learning outcomes

Pupils will recognise that:

- > The subjects for Burns' poems and songs were often taken from his own life
- > Burns wrote his poems and songs in the Scots Language
- > Burns' Kilmarnock edition of poems brought him his initial fame
- > Attitudes in society have changed over the years

Skills

- > Plan a sequence of activities for tackling an enquiry
- > Suggest sources of information to assist in enquiry tasks
- > Select known enquiry methods / equipment to access, select and record information
- > Present findings communicating key points clearly

Resources Required

- > Burns House Museum, Mauchline, Virtual Tour
- > Poem – To A Mountain Daisy (inspired by life on the farm)
- > Poem – To A Mouse (inspired by life on the farm)
- > Poem – Holy Willie's Prayer (inspired by the Church Elder, William Fisher)
- > Song – My Luvie is Like a Red, Red Rose
- > Changing Attitudes Worksheet
- > Map of Scotland Sheet (found in the Actual Visits section)

Burns House Museum, Mauchline: Pre Visit Activity Details

Discussion
Compare and Contrast
Burns' inspiration with
that of pupils

Examine extracts of the poems / songs written by Burns
To A Mouse (inspired by life on the farm)
To A Mountain Daisy (inspired by life on the farm)
Holy Willie's Prayer (inspired by the Church Elder, William Fisher)
My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose

Discuss with pupils what / who they think inspired each piece?
If pupils were to write a poem about a key aspect of their life (a person, an object, a pet etc) who / what would it be about? What Scots words would they use to describe that person/object/pet?

Discussion
Compare and Contrast
Scots and
English Language

Burns wrote in the Scots language. Read pupils one of his poems to pupils to illustrate this and ask them if they recognise any of the Scots words used.
Ask pupils to make a list of Scots words they or their friends use when talking to each other. Opposite each word, ask them to write their meanings in English.

Discussion
Compare and Contrast
Attitudes then and now

In days gone by it was the husband's job to provide for the wife. This being so, Jean's father did not want her to marry a poor farmer.
Discuss his reasons with your pupils.

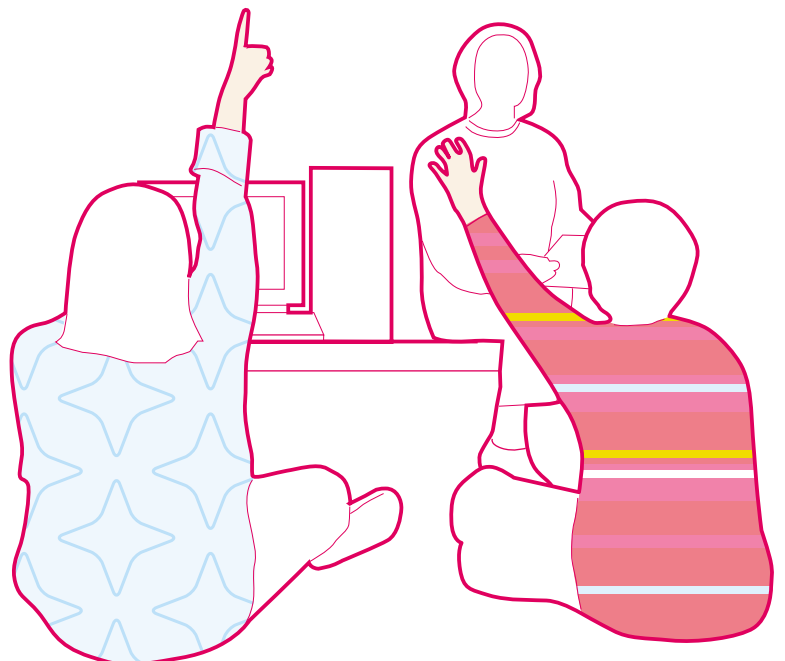
Is this an issue with couples today? Does it matter whether the male earns more than the female partner or vice versa?

Jean bore Robert's twins before they were married, which, in those days was greatly frowned upon. Such children were often sent away, such was the shame on the family.

Discuss the attitude of society nowadays to having children outwith marriage.

Discuss with pupils whether they think Jean's father was being hypocritical allowing Jean to marry Robert after he heard of his fame and success with the Kilmarnock Edition of his poems?

Do people suddenly flock to those newly made famous today? Why? (think about pop stars, TV personalities and such like)



Burns House Museum, Mauchline: The Virtual Visit

Virtual Tour

Now, use the Virtual Tour to explore the variety of historical objects situated in this venue by clicking on the Learning and then the Virtual Tours button on the website and selecting Burns House Museum.

Each object relates specifically to the learning outcomes above.

(This could be carried out with small groups at computers or as a class using an interactive whiteboard.)

Clothes of the day – women

Description: Jean Armour would have worn clothes like these – a cotton mitch or mop cap on her head (a bonnet was worn only for special occasions), a woollen shawl around her shoulders and a cotton apron to keep her long skirts and petticoats clean

Clothes of the day – men

Description: Robert Burns would have worn clothes like these – a knee length wool coat called a frockcoat, short wool trousers gathered at the knee with stockings underneath and leather shoes.

General View of Jean Armour Room

Description: This room is where Jean Armour and Robert lived – in those days rooms were multi-purpose and here they would sleep and eat. Jean even gave birth to a set of twins in this room!

Copy of letter 'My dearest Love'

Description: In the 18th Century, letter writing was one of the only ways of communicating to loved ones when away from home.

When Robert was away from home he would constantly write to his 'dearest love' Jean. This romantic letter shows the love Robert and Jean had for each other.

Box Bed

Description: Jean and Robert slept in a box bed just like this one. Curtains were hung around this type of bed to exclude draughts and to give the people sleeping inside privacy.

Mattresses and pillows or bolsters, were stuffed with straw or similar materials.

Cradle

Description: Jean would lay her babies in a little cradle carved from wood, just like this one. Rockers were added to the base to allow the baby to be rocked to sleep.



Burns House Museum, Mauchline: The Virtual Visit

Jean Armour statue	<i>Description:</i> This statue shows the pretty Jean as a young woman. Her kind, patient nature and her beauty gave Robert many ideas for some of his best known love poems and songs including, My Luve is like a Red, Red Rose.
Nance Tinnock's Tavern	<i>Description:</i> Robert Burns enjoyed being with friends. When he stayed in Mauchline, he often met friends in this pub and wrote about them in his poems.
Holy Willie's grave	<i>Description:</i> William Fisher was a Kirk Elder (an officer of the church) in Mauchline. His grave can be seen here. Burns wrote about Willie in his famous poem Holy Willie's Prayer. According to Burns, Willie pretended to be holy, but was anything but!
Original script of Holy Willie's Prayer (featured in Kilmarnock edition)	<i>Description:</i> This is the actual poem of Holy Willie's Prayer Burns wrote. It is in Burns' own handwriting. This poem was about William Fisher the Kirk Elder (an officer of the church) in Mauchline. Burns puts words into the mouth of Willie in an imaginary prayer to God. In it, Willie wishes God to forgive himself and to condemn his enemies in Mauchline (who can see through him!). Since the poem was a criticism of a Kirk Elder (the Kirk was very powerful at the time of Burns) Burns wasn't able to publish the poem straight away. Instead (as you'll notice from the folds on this manuscript) the poet circulated Holy Willie's Prayer to friends for their amusement. It is now known and recited across the world.
Original Kilmarnock Edition	<i>Description:</i> This book is an actual edition of Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect (meaning poems mainly in the Scots language) published in 1786. Copies of this book are often known as the Kilmarnock Edition. Kilmarnock was the Scottish town (only 8 miles from Mauchline) where they were published.

Burns House Museum, Mauchline: Suggested Post Visit Activities

Burns' Inspiration A Friend Indeed

Burns' poetry was often inspired by friends. Ask pupils to choose a friend and to think carefully about his / her characteristics and habits and to write them down.

How many of these characteristics can be made into similes and metaphors, where that person is likened to something or is said to be something else.

Ask pupils to make lists of these and when this has been done, ask pupils to write a 5 line Cinquain Poem using their favourite lines. The format for this type of poem is detailed below:

Name of Friend	James
Describe him (2 adjectives)	Loyal, Helpful
Metaphor to describe him (3 words)	Is a star
Simile to describe him (4 words)	Bright as a button
Name of friend	James

Holy Willie

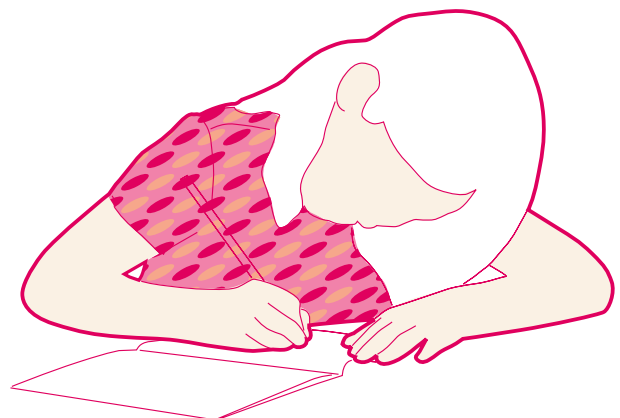
Draw your pupils' attention to the picture of the original script of Holy Willie's Prayer in the Virtual Tour of this venue by clicking on Virtual Tours and selecting this venue. Read the abridged version of Holy Willie's Prayer and use it as a basis for discussion. You may wish to use the online Scots Dictionary to help with translation. This can be found at www.britannia.org/Scotland/scotsdictionary/a.html

Burns was an observant man. What character traits did he notice in Willie?

Which parts of the poem tell us this?

What was wrong with Willie's attitude?

How should he have behaved instead?



Burns House Museum, Mauchline: Suggested Post Visit Activities

It must be Love!

Draw your pupils' attention to the picture showing the copy of the letter beginning 'My dearest Love' and the statue of Jean Armour in the Virtual Tour by clicking on Virtual Tours and selecting this venue. Robert Burns wrote this letter to Jean Armour, his wife. Discuss his feelings for Jean from the evidence in the letter.

Now read the words of the song My Luvie is Like a Red, Red Rose and use it as a basis once again to illustrate Burns' feelings towards Jean. You may wish to use the online Scots Dictionary to help with translation. This can be found at www.britannia.org/Scotland/scotsdictionary/a.html

Burns was a thoughtful man. Why does he compare her to a rose and a tuneful melody?

Can pupils pick out any phrases to show the depth of his feelings towards Jean?

Ask pupils to think about someone they love – a family member, a pet, a friend etc. Can they think of what they might compare that person too. Use the format in the A Friend Indeed section above to create a similar poem for a loved one.

Daisy, Daisy

Burns was a reflective man. Read the abridged version of To a Mountain Daisy and use it as a basis for discussion to illustrate Burns' thoughts on the fate of this delicate flower. You may wish to use the online Scots Dictionary to help with translation. This can be found at www.britannia.org/Scotland/scotsdictionary/a.html

Bring in a small selection of wild or garden flowers for pupils to look at or, alternatively, look at Pictures of flowers. Discuss the range of adjectives, verbs, adverbs, similes, metaphors etc that could be used to describe each, then ask pupils to write a Haiku poem about their chosen flower in the format below.

So for a daisy it may read:

Line 1 – 5 syllables

Delicate petals

Line 2 – 7 syllables

Blowing in the soft breezes

Line 3 – 5 syllables

Loves me, loves me not

Scots and English Language Braid Scots

Ask pupils to make a glossary of Scots words from one or more of the poems / songs chosen for this section, then, using a Scots dictionary, if you have one, get them to write down the meanings of the words. If not, a simple Scots dictionary pupils could use online is www.britannia.org/scotland/scotsdictionary/a.shtml

Argie-Bargie

As a class, discuss the types of things pupils argue about in the playground. Group your class in pairs and tell them to choose a topic they'd like to argue about! (For once they are going to be given the chance to do this without getting into trouble!!) When each pair have decided on their topic, they should begin the dispute. The catch is...they should try to ensure what they say is in the Scots language.

Bring the class together and listen to some of the pieces. Do pupils like talking in dialect? Can they convey the message more / less easily? Did they find it more / less difficult than talking in English?

Burns House Museum, Mauchline: Suggested Post Visit Activities

Attitudes Then and Now A Marriage Made in Heaven?

Set the scene with your pupils. Jean and Robert have decided to marry. Jean's father is not happy about her marrying a poor farmer. She pleads for her father to listen to her and gives him many good reasons for them to marry.

Sit the class in a circle and tell them that they are going to try to get all the way around the circle quoting Jean's good reasons for the marriage. As the teacher, you start off by saying...'But Dad, he's so kind to me! The next pupil must think of another reason, then the next and the next until everyone has had a go.

Next, set a new scene with your pupils. Jean and Robert have decided to marry. Jean's father is not happy about her marrying this poor farmer. He sternly gives her his reasons for them to not to marry.

Still sitting in a circle, tell your class that they are going to try to get all the way around the circle quoting her father's good reasons for them not marrying. As the teacher, you start off by saying...'But Jean, how will he make money farming when the soil is so poor here! The next pupil must think of another reason, then the next and the next until everyone has had a go.

All Change

Jean had Robert's children before they were married – frowned upon then, but accepted nowadays.

Give out the Changing Attitudes Worksheet and divide pupils into groups of 3 or 4. Ask them to look at the categories listed on the sheet and come up with an idea for each category about an attitude that has changed over time. When groups have completed this task, discuss ideas as a class.

Time Line It's a date

Begin a class timeline on a long piece of paper or card. Mount this on the wall. Plot Burns' time at Mount Oliphant Farm (1766-77), Lochlie Farm (1777-84), then Mossgiel Farm near Mauchline (1784-88). Also add the date of his meeting with Jean Armour (1785). You may wish to add the year Robert Burns (1759) and Jean Armour (1765) were born and when they died (1796 and 1834 respectively). How many years was Jean a widow?

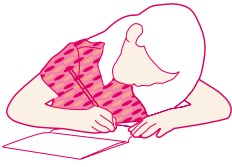
Discuss with pupils any other important world events going on at the time. You may wish to have another long piece of paper or card situated below this one on the wall to enable pupils to compare relevant Burn-related dates with the other important dates you have noted

Plot It

Ask pupils to plot Mauchline on the blank Map of Scotland Sheet. You may also wish to plot some other key venues in Burns' life on the map too.

- > Alloway (birthplace)
- > Tarbolton (set up the Bachelors' Club here)
- > Edinburgh (went here to promote his Kilmarnock Edition of poetry)
- > Ellisland (farmed here and began his excise career here)
- > Dumfries (spent final years of his life here)

Burns toured Scotland to both research and promote his work. Ask pupils to find out where Burns went on his tours of Scotland. Plot these on the map too.



Burns House Museum, Mauchline: Changing Attitudes Worksheet

Jean had two of Robert Burns' children before they were married – this was frowned upon then, but would be accepted nowadays. Attitudes (or the way people think and feel about things) have changed over the years.

- > In groups of 3 or 4 look at the subjects below
- > Choose an area within that subject you are interested in and note it down
- > Write about the attitude in the past and then write about how it has changed today. The first one has been done for you
- > Be ready to discuss your ideas with the class.

Subject	Area of Interest	In the past	Today
Manners	Opening doors	Men always opened doors for women. It was seen as good manners and respectful to females.	Although some men still do this, it is seen by many as old fashioned in days when men and women are seen as equals
Fashion			
Religion			

Subject	Area of Interest	In the past	Today
Language			
The role of women in society			
Your own choice			

Burns House Museum, Mauchline: Poems

To A Mountain Daisy (Abridged)

Burns wrote this poem as he farmed in the fields. He saw beauty in a delicate little flower and how determined it was to struggle to grow among the clods of earth and stones.

However, in order to get on with his ploughing, Burns must turn over the soil and with it the daisy. In doing this, the fate of the daisy is decided – it is crushed beneath the plough.

Reflecting on his actions, Burns was inspired to write this poem.

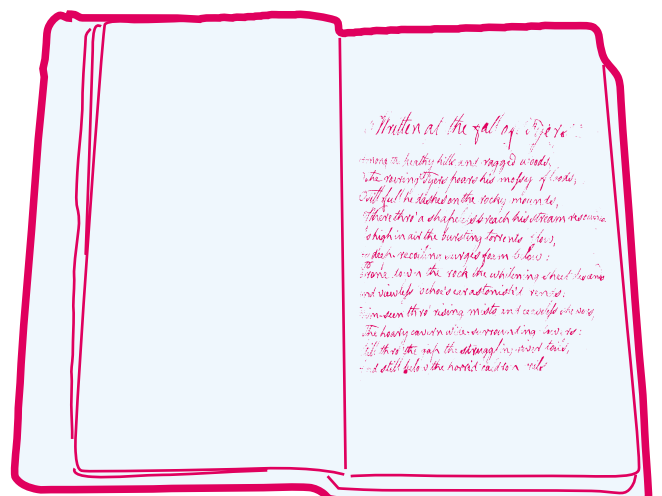
Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flow'r,
Thou's met me in an evil hour;
For I maun crush among the stoure
Thy slender stem:
To spare thee now is past my pow'r,
Thou bonie gem.

Cauld blew the bitter-biting north
Upon thy early, humble birth;
Yet cheerfully thou glinted forth
Amid the storm,
Scarce rear'd above the parent-earth
Thy tender form.

The flaunting flow'rs our gardens yield,
High shelt'ring woods and wa's maun shield;
But thou, beneath the random bield
O' clod or stane,
Adorns the histie stibble-field,
Unseen, alane.

There, in thy scanty mantle clad,
Thy snawie bosom sun-ward spread,
Thou lifts thy unassuming head
In humble guise;
But now the share uptears thy bed,
And low thou lies!

Ev'n thou who mourn'st the Daisy's fate,
That fate is thine - no distant date;
Stern Ruin's plough-share drives elate,
Full on thy bloom,
Till crush'd beneath the furrow's weight
Shall be thy doom!



Burns House Museum, Mauchline: Poems

Holy Willie's Prayer (Abridged)

This is a funny poem, written by Burns during his time in Mauchline, about a Mauchline Kirk Elder (an officer of the church) called William Fisher, who, according to Burns, pretended to be holy but was anything but!

Willie is praying to God to save himself and to damn a number of his enemies in the village.

He begins by asking God not to judge people by what they've done but by who they are. He then goes on to list all the faults of his enemies, without really thinking about why he is actually speaking to God.

At the very end of his rant he remembers why, and after lots of bickering, finally asks God to forgive his own sins.

O Thou that in the Heavens does dwell,
Wha, as it pleases best Thyself,
Sends ane to Heaven an' ten to Hell
A' for Thy glory,
And no for onie guid or ill
They've done before Thee!

Lord, mind Gau'n Hamilton's deserts:
He drinks, an' swears, an' plays at cartes,
Yet has sae monie takin arts
Wi' great and sma',
Frae God's ain Priest the peoples hearts
He steals awa.

When from my mither's womb I fell,
Thou might hae plung'd me deep in hell
To gnash my gooms, and weep, and wail
In burning lakes,
Whare damned devils roar and yell,
Chain'd to their stakes.

Lord, hear my earnest cry and pray'r
Against that Presbyt'ry of Ayr!
Thy strong right hand, Lord, mak it bare
Upo' their heads!
Lord, visit them, an' dinna spare,
For their misdeeds!

Yet I am here, a chosen sample,
To show Thy grace is great and ample:
I'm here a pillar o' Thy temple,
Strong as a rock,
A guide, a buckler, and example
To a' Thy flock!

Lord, in Thy day o' vengeance try him!
Lord, visit him wha did employ him!
And pass not in Thy mercy by them,
Nor hear their pray'r,
But for Thy people's sake destroy them,
An' dinna spare!

Lord, bless Thy chosen in this place,
For here Thou has a chosen race!
But God confound their stubborn face
An' blast their name,
Wha bring Thy elders to disgrace
An' open shame!

But, Lord, remember me and mine
Wi' mercies temporal and divine,
That I for grace an' gear may shine
Excell'd by nane;
And a' the glory shall be Thine
Amen, Amen!

Burns House Museum, Mauchline: Poems

To A Mouse

Whilst ploughing the soil in the cold winter, Burns disturbs the cosy nest of a field mouse. He sympathises with the frightened mouse, regretting that man and nature cannot live together peacefully. Burns compares the life of a mouse, thrown from the comfort of its home, to the life of the small farmer uprooted by changes in farming.

Wee, sleekit, cow'rin', tim'rous beastie,
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty
Wi bickering brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,
Wi' murdering pattle.

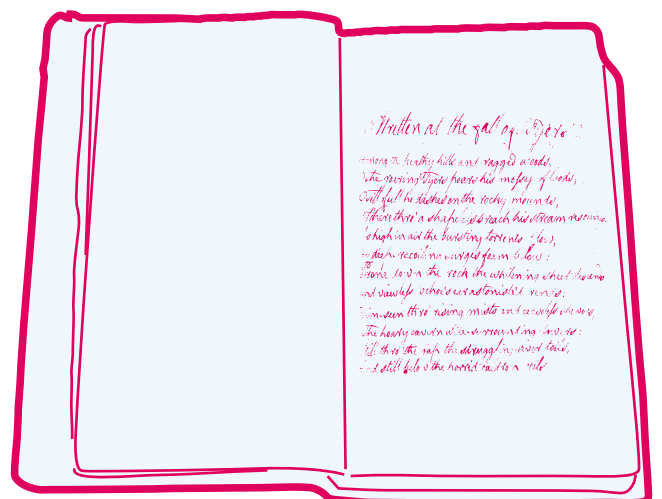
I'm truly sorry man's dominion,
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor earth-born companion,
An' fellow mortal.

Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's win's ensuin,
Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,
An' weary winter comin fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
Thou thought to dwell,
Till crash! the cruel coulter past
Out thro' thy cell.

That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble,
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!
Now thou's turned out, for a' thy trouble,
But house or hald,
To thole the winter's sleety dribble,
An' cranreuch cauld.

Still thou are blest, compared wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But och! I backward cast my e'e,
On prospects drear!
An' forward, tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear!



Burns House Museum, Mauchline: Poems

My Luve is Like a Red, Red Rose

Burns wrote this song for the love of his life – Jean Armour. The depth of his feelings for her are evident as seen in the words below.

O, my luve's like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June.
O, my luve's like the melodie,
That's sweetly play'd in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonie lass,
So deep in luve am I,
And I will luve thee still, my Dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my Dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun!
O I will luve thee still, my Dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only Luve,
And fare thee weel a while!
And I will come again, my Luve,
Tho' it were ten thousand mile!