



# Creation: our place, our space

## William Blake: being inspired by creation

This is William Blake, who was born in London in 1757.

When he grew up he became an artist and a writer, but he always saw himself as “a child of God, whose playthings were the sun, moon and stars, the earth and heavens”. He was full of wonder at creation.

When he was a child William enjoyed wandering the streets of London and escaping into the countryside. Once he was startled to “see a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars.” When he went home and told his parents they were not amused, and his mother threatened to beat him because she thought he was lying.

Much to his parents’ dismay, William continued to see visions. But they did encourage his artistic talents and sent him to drawing school. They didn’t have enough money to send him to art college, so they got him a job working for an engraver, carving pictures in wood and metal and printing them in ink. William went on to paint and write poems, many of which were inspired by his visions of God, angels and creation.

William was also interested in social action. It was the time of the French and American Revolutions, and people were thinking about how the rich treated the poor, and whether it was right to own slaves. William saw the beauty of creation in the world around him, and the wonderful harmony in the visions God gave him, so he felt called to join in campaigns to make things fair for everyone. He wrote poems and painted pictures to help the cause. He wrote two poems called *The Chimney Sweeper* in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. They expose the terrible lives of the boys who were sent up chimneys, and one shows a chimney boy dreaming of an angel coming to set them all free.

### Wondering Questions

I wonder which was your favourite part of this story?

I wonder which was the most important part?

I wonder if there is anything you would change?

I wonder what will happen next?

I wonder where you are in this story?

### Response Activity

I wonder if you would like to write and illustrate a poem or slogan to campaign about caring for creation or people?

### Creative response

I wonder how you can show what this story has meant to you, or what it has made you think about?

**Resources:** selection of art and craft materials to choose from

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## Songs of Innocence:

### The Chimney Sweeper

When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! [a]  
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,  
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved: so I said,  
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet; and that very night,  
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight, -  
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,  
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black.

And by came an angel who had a bright key,  
And he opened the coffins and set them all free;  
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,  
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;  
And the angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father, and never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,  
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.  
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm;  
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.

## Songs of Experience:

### The Chimney Sweeper

A little black thing among the snow,  
Crying "'weep! 'weep!" in notes of woe!  
"Where are thy father and mother? Say!"--  
"They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,  
And smiled among the winter's snow,  
They clothed me in the clothes of death,  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy and dance and sing,  
They think they have done me no injury,  
And are gone to praise God and his priest and king,  
Who make up a heaven of our misery."