

The Oyster Shell

Below is an excerpt from a longer poem, “The Oyster Shell,” written by Japanese poet Kambara Ariake in 1902. Read the excerpt and be prepared to discuss the questions.

The Oyster Shell

An oyster in his shell
Lives in a boundless sea,
Alone, precarious, limited,
How miserable his thoughts . . .

Unseeing and unhelped,

He sleeps behind a sheltering rock.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the oyster represent? The shell?
2. What does the poet mean by *boundless*?
3. What types of words are used in line 3 of the poem?
4. Why use an ellipsis to close stanza 1?
5. Why is the oyster not visible? Explain the connotations of “Unseeing and unhelped.”
6. What is the tone in the last two lines of the excerpt?
7. What seems to be the message/theme of this poem?

Source: Kambara Ariake. “The Oyster Shell,” in *The Poetry of Living Japan*, Ed. Takamichi Ninomiya and D.J. Enright (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1957). Internet Archive. 10 Mar. 2001. http://archive.org/stream/poetryoflivingja007840mbp/poetryoflivingja007840mbp_djvu.txt.