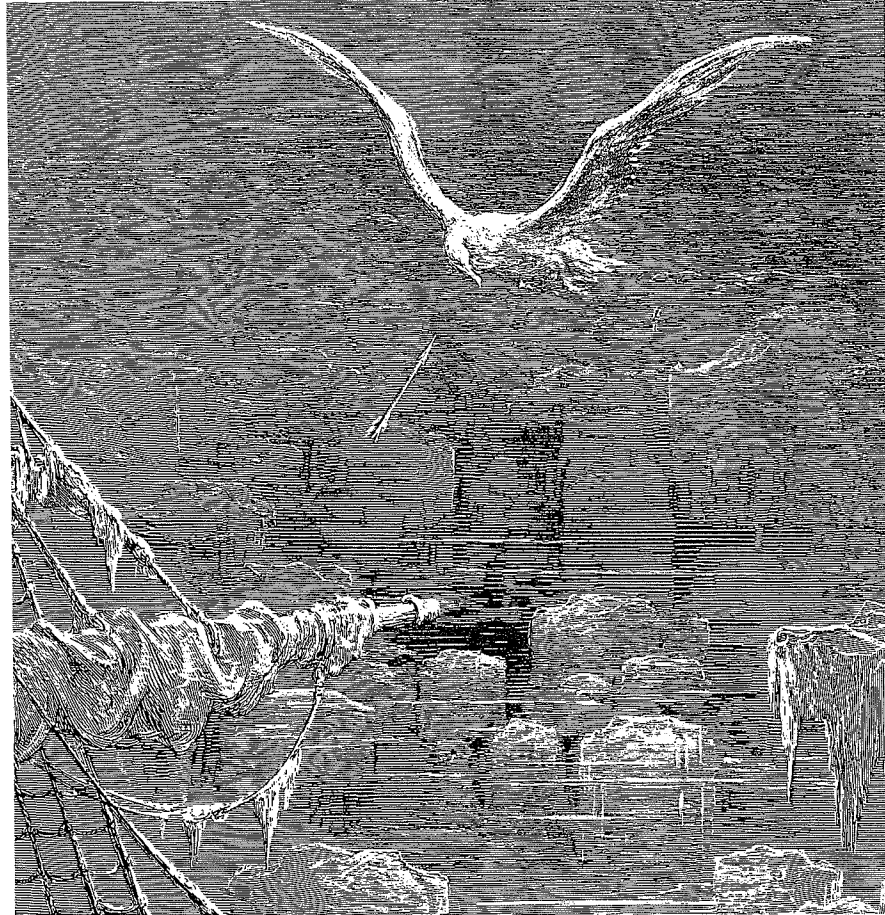


THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

Samuel Taylor Coleridge



▲ **Critical Viewing** Identify two elements in this engraving that create a gloomy, suspense-filled atmosphere. **[Analyze]**

Background

Coleridge used dreams as the basis of many of his great poems. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was based on a dream reported by his friend John Cruikshank. Starting with the dream as raw material, Coleridge and Wordsworth began to elaborate upon it. Wordsworth suggested that the act that would drive the entire poem was a crime committed at sea. Using this idea and his own lively imagination, Coleridge wrote a poem that has chilled and enthralled audiences to this day. (The margin notes to the left of the poem were written by the poet.)

Argument

How a Ship having passed the Line¹ was driven by storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole: and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell: and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country.

*An ancient Mariner
meeteth three
Gallants bidden to
a wedding feast
and detaineth one.*

Part I

It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
“By thy long gray beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp’st thou me?”

5 “The Bridegroom’s doors are opened wide,
And I am next of kin;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May’st hear the merry din.”

He holds him with his skinny hand,
10 “There was a ship,” quoth he.
“Hold off! unhand me, graybeard loon!”
Eftsoons² his hand dropped he.

*The Wedding Guest
is spellbound by
the eye of the old
seafaring man and
constrained to hear
his tale.*

He holds him with his glittering eye—
The Wedding Guest stood still,
15 And listens like a three years’ child:
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
20 The bright-eyed Mariner.

*The Mariner tells
how the ship sailed
southward with
a good wind and
fair weather till it
reached the Line.*

“The ship was cheered, the harbor cleared,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk,³ below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top.

25 “The Sun came up upon the left,
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the sea.

Literary Analysis

Poetic Sound Devices

What examples of internal rhymes and assonance can you find in lines 5–8?

1. Line Equator.
2. Eftsoons immediately.
3. kirk church.

Reading Check

What effect does the ancient Mariner have on the Wedding Guest?

Till a great sea
bird, called the
Albatross, came
through the snow-
fog, and was
received with great
joy and hospitality.

And lo! the
Albatross proveth
a bird of good omen,
and followeth the
ship as it returned
northward through
fog and floating ice.

The ancient Mariner
inhospitably killeth
the pious bird of
good omen.

His shipmates cry
out against the
ancient Mariner for
killing the bird of
good luck.

“At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough⁹ the fog it came;
65 As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God’s name.

“It ate the food it ne’er had eat,¹⁰
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
70 The helmsman steered us through!

“And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariner’s hollo!

75 “In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,¹¹
It perched for vespers¹² nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke
white,
Glimmered the white Moonshine.”

“God save thee, ancient Mariner!
80 From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—
Why look’st thou so?”¹³ “With my crossbow
I shot the Albatross.”

Part II

“The Sun now rose upon the right:¹⁴
Out of the sea came he,
85 Still hid in mist, and on the left
Went down into the sea.

“And the good south wind still blew behind,
But no sweet bird did follow.
Nor any day for food or play
90 Came to the mariners’ hollo!

“And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work ’em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.

9. **thorough** through.

10. **eat** (et) old form of *eaten*.

11. **shroud** *n.* ropes stretching from the ship’s side to the masthead.

12. **vespers** evenings.

13. **God** . . . so spoken by the Wedding Guest.

14. **The Sun** . . . **right** The ship is now headed north.

Literary Analysis

Poetic Sound Devices

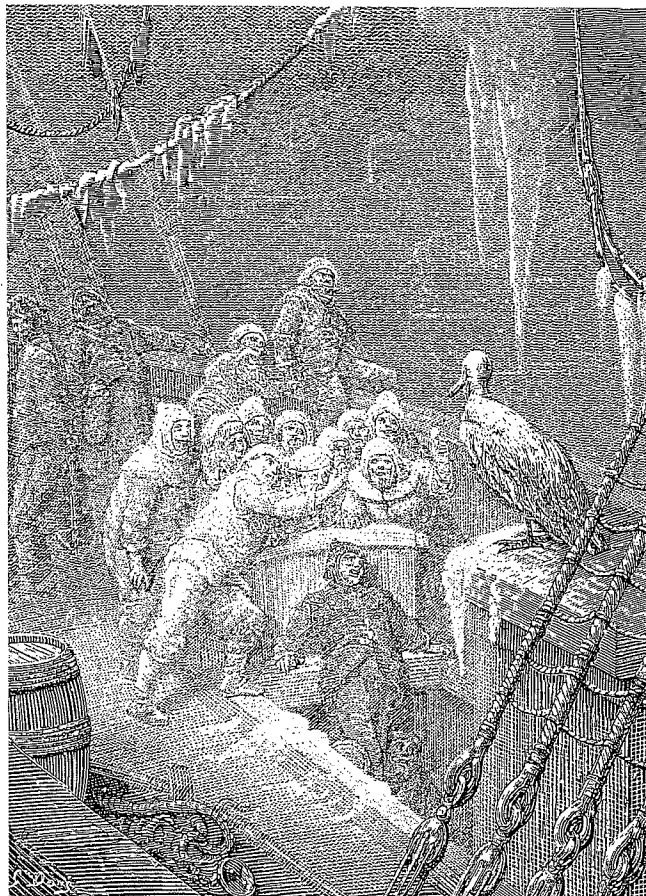
Identify one sound device used in lines 67–70.

Reading Strategy

Analyzing Poetic Effects

How does the use of alliteration and internal rhyme in lines 91–94 give a fatal feeling to the Mariner’s deed?

averred (ə vɜrd’) *v.*: stated to be true



Engraving by Gustave Doré for "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

◀ **Critical Viewing**
 What effects does the artist, Gustave Doré, use to capture the eerie mood of the poem? **[Analyze]**

But when the fog cleared off, they justify the same, and thus make themselves accomplices in the crime.

The fair breeze continues; the ship enters the Pacific Ocean, and sails northward, even till it reaches the Line. The Ship hath been suddenly becalmed.

95 Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
 That made the breeze to blow!

“Nor dim nor red, like God’s own head,
 The glorious Sun uprist;¹⁵
 Then all averred, I had killed the bird
 100 That brought the fog and mist.
 ’Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
 That bring the fog and mist.

“The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
 The furrow¹⁶ followed free;
 105 We were the first that ever burst
 Into that silent sea.

“Down dropped the breeze, the sails
 dropped down,
 ’Twas sad as sad could be;

15. uprist arose.
 16. furrow ship’s wake.

✓ Reading Check

What has the ancient Mariner done to the Albatross?

And we did speak only to break
110 The silence of the sea!

“All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

115 “Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

*And the Albatross
begins to be
avenged.*

“Water, water, everywhere,
120 And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.

“The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
125 Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

“About, about, in reel and rout¹⁷
The death fires¹⁸ danced at night;
The water, like a witch’s oils,
130 Burned green, and blue and white.

*A Spirit had
followed them;
one of the invisible
inhabitants of this
planet, neither
departed souls
nor angels. They
are very numerous,
and there is no
climate or element
without one or more.*

“And some in dreams assurèd were
Of the Spirit that plagued us so;
Nine fathom deep he had followed us
From the land of mist and snow.

135 “And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

*The shipmates, in
their sore distress,
would fain throw
the whole guilt on
the ancient Mariner:
in sign whereof they
hang the dead sea
bird round his neck.*

“Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
140 Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

17. rout disorderly crowd.

18. death fires St. Elmo’s fire, a visible electrical discharge from a ship’s mast, believed by sailors to be an omen of disaster.

Reading Strategy

Analyzing Poetic Effects

How does the repetition of words in lines 115–119 contribute to the image of the stilled ship?

Reading Strategy

Analyzing Poetic Effects

What effect does the increased concentration of sound devices in lines 127–130 have?

Part III

*The ancient Mariner
beholdeth a sign in
the element afar off.*

“There passed a weary time. Each throat
Was parched, and glazed each eye.
145 A weary time! a weary time!
How glazed each weary eye,
When looking westward, I beheld
A something in the sky.

“At first it seemed a little speck,
150 And then it seemed a mist;
It moved and moved, and took at last
A certain shape, I wist.¹⁹

“A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
And still it neared and neared:
155 As if it dodged a water sprite,
It plunged and tacked and veered.

*At its nearer
approach, it seemeth
him to be a ship;
and at a dear ran-
som he freeth his
speech from the
bonds of thirst.*

“With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
We could nor laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
160 I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,
And cried, A sail! a sail!

A flash of joy:

“With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
Agape they heard me call:
Gramercy!²⁰ for joy did grin,
165 And all at once their breath drew in,
As they were drinking all.

*And horror follows.
For can it be a ship
that comes onward
without wind or
tide?*

“See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!
Hither to work us weal;²¹
Without a breeze, without a tide,
170 She steadies with upright keel!

“The western wave was all aflame.
The day was well nigh done!
Almost upon the western wave
Rested the broad bright Sun;
175 When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun.

*It seemeth him
but the skeleton
of a ship.*

“And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,
(Heaven’s Mother send us grace!)

19. wist knew.

20. Gramercy (grə mər’ sē): great thanks.

21. work us weal assist us.

Reading Strategy
Analyzing Poetic Effects
What poetic effect does
Coleridge use in lines
149–153 to build
suspense?

Literary Analysis
**Poetic Sound Devices
and the Language of
the Fantastic** How does
the line “Hither to work
us weal” give the sense
that these events are
taking place in a strange,
distant era?

Reading Check

What causes the sailors
to suffer?

As if through a dungeon grate he peered
 180 With broad and burning face.

And its ribs are seen
 as bars on the face
 of the setting Sun.

The Specter Woman
 and her Death-
 mate, and no other
 on board the skele-
 ton ship.

185 "Are those *her* ribs through which the Sun
 Did peer, as through a grate?
 And is that Woman all her crew?
 Is that a Death? and are there two?
 Is Death that woman's mate?

Like vessel, like
 crew! Death and
 Life-in-Death have
 diced for the ship's
 crew, and she (the
 latter) winneth the
 ancient Mariner.

190 "Her lips were red, *her* looks were free,
 Her locks were yellow as gold;
 Her skin was as white as leprosy,
 The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she,
 Who thicks man's blood with cold.

195 "The naked hulk alongside came,
 And the twain were casting dice;
 'The game is done! I've won! I've won!'
 Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

No twilight within
 the courts of
 the Sun.

200 "The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
 At one stride comes the dark;
 With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
 Off shot the specter bark.

At the rising of
 the Moon,

205 "We listened and looked sideways up!
 Fear at my heart, as at a cup,
 My lifeblood seemed to sip!
 The stars were dim, and thick the night,
 The steersman's face by his lamp
 gleamed white;
 From the sails the dew did drip—
 Till clomb²³ above the eastern bar
 210 The hornèd²⁴ Moon, with one bright star
 Within the nether tip.

One after another,

"One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,²⁵
 Too quick for groan or sigh,

Literary Analysis
Poetic Sound Devices
and the Language of
the Fantastic In what
 way does the name of the
 woman—Life-in-Death—
 add to the eerie,
 mysterious atmosphere
 of the story?

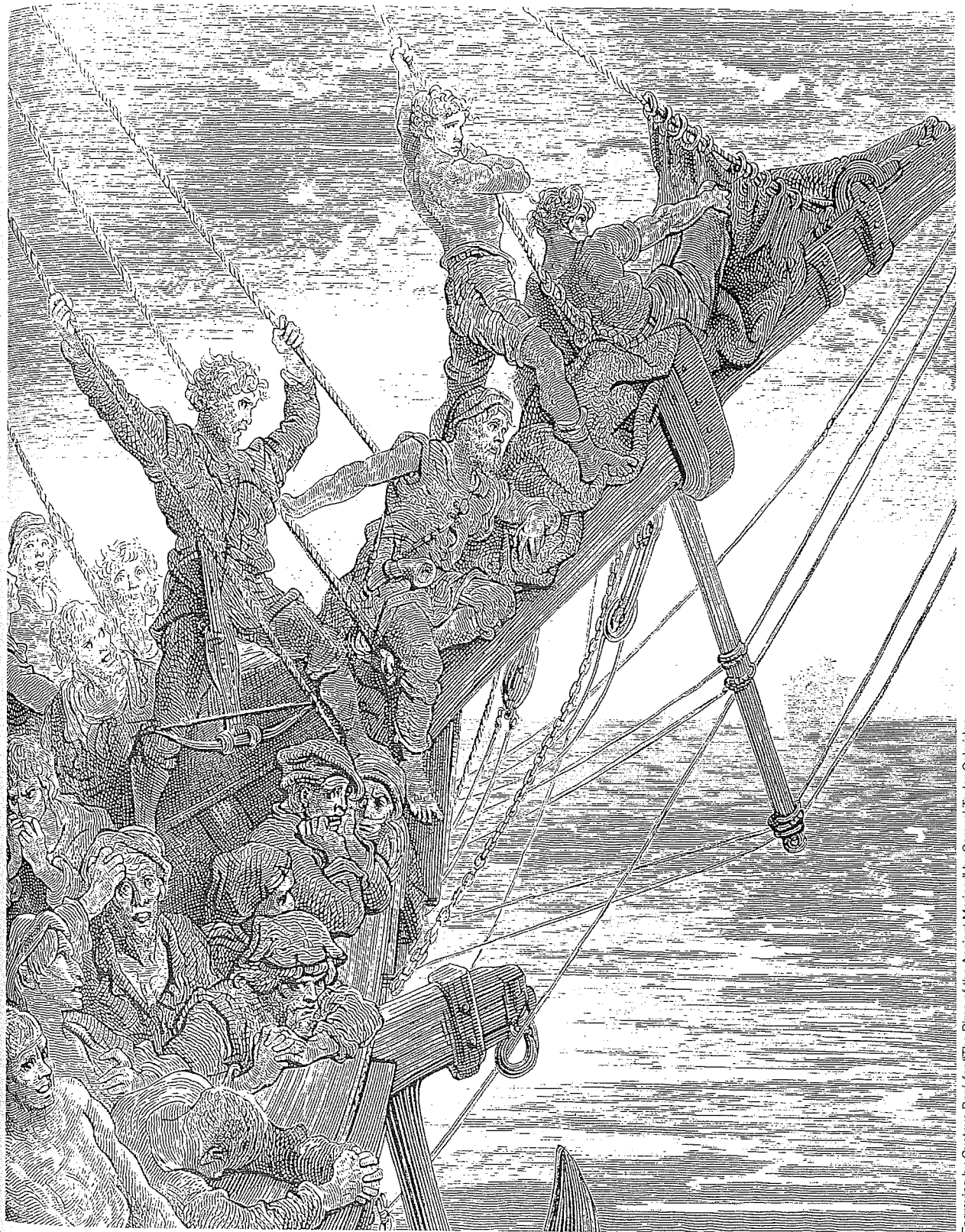
Reading Strategy
Analyzing Poetic Effects
 Does the alliteration in
 line 208 help you imagine
 what is being described?
 Explain.

22. gossameres floating cobwebs.

23. clomb climbed.

24. hornèd crescent.

25. star-dogged Moon omen of impending evil to sailors.



Engraving by Gustave Doré for "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

▲ **Critical Viewing** What reactions to the sighting of the other ship would you expect from the sailors? Can you find such reactions in the engraving? Explain. **[Connect]**

Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,
215 And cursed me with his eye.

*His shipmates drop
down dead.*

“Four times fifty living men,
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.

*But Life-in-Death
begins her work on
the ancient Mariner.*

220 “The souls did from their bodies fly—
They fled to bliss or woe!
And every soul, it passed me by,
Like the whizz of my crossbow!”

Part IV

*The Wedding Guest
feareth that a Spirit
is talking to him;*

“I fear thee, ancient Mariner!
225 I fear thy skinny hand!
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
As is the ribbed sea sand.

*But the ancient
Mariner assureth
him of his bodily
life, and proceedeth
to relate his horrible
penance.*

“I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
And thy skinny hand, so brown.”
230 “Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding Guest!
This body dropped not down.

“Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
235 My soul in agony.

*He despiseth
the creatures
of the calm,*

“The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

*And envieth that
they should live,
and so many
lie dead.*

240 “I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.

“I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
245 But or²⁶ ever a prayer had gushed,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust.

“I closed my lids, and kept them close,
And the balls like pulses beat;

26. or before.

Literary Analysis
Poetic Sound Devices
and the Language of
the Fantastic How does
Coleridge’s unusual way
of expressing numbers
contribute to the fairy-tale
atmosphere?

Reading Strategy
Analyzing Poetic Effects
How does repetition in
lines 240–243 emphasize
the starkness of the
Mariner’s situation—the
fact that he has “no
way out”?

*But the curse liveth
for him in the eye of
the dead men.*

*In his loneliness and
fixedness he year-
neth towards the
journeying Moon,
and the stars that
still sojourn, yet
still move onward;
and everywhere the
blue sky belongs to
them, and is their
appointed rest, and
their native country
and their own
natural homes,
which they enter
unannounced, as
lords that are cer-
tainly expected and
yet there is a silent
joy at their arrival.*

*By the light of the
Moon he beholdeth
God's creatures of
the great calm.*

*Their beauty and
their happiness.*

*He blesseth them in
his heart.*

250 For the sky and the sea and the sea and the sky
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

“The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
Nor rot nor reek did they;
255 The look with which they looked on me
Had never passed away.

“An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! more horrible than that
260 Is the curse in a dead man's eye!
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
And yet I could not die.

“The moving Moon went up the sky,
And nowhere did abide:
265 Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside—

“Her beams bemoaned the sultry main,²⁷
Like April hoarfrost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
270 The charmed water burned away
A still and awful red.

“Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
275 And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in in hoary flakes.

“Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
280 They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

“O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
285 And I blessed them unaware;
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

27. main open sea.

Reading Strategy

Analyzing Poetic Effects

What effect is created by the repetition in line 250? How does this effect mirror the Mariner's situation?

sojourn (sō' jurn) v. stay for a while

Reading Check

What has happened to the other sailors?

*The spell begins
to break.*

“The selfsame moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
290 The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

Part V

“Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,
Beloved from pole to pole!
To Mary queen the praise be given!
295 She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,
That slid into my soul.

*By grace of the holy
Mother, the ancient
Mariner is refreshed
with rain.*

“The silly²⁸ buckets on the deck,
That had so long remained,
I dreamed that they were filled with dew;
300 And when I awoke, it rained.

“My lips were wet, my throat was cold,
My garments all were dank;
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,
And still my body drank.

305 “I moved, and could not feel my limbs:
I was so light—almost
I thought that I had died in sleep,
And was a blessèd ghost.

*He heareth sounds
and seeth strange
sights and commo-
tions in the sky and
the element.*

“And soon I heard a roaring wind:
310 It did not come anear;
But with its sound it shook the sails,
That were so thin and sere.²⁹

“The upper air burst into life!
And a hundred fire flags sheen,³⁰
315 To and fro they were hurried about!
And to and fro, and in and out,
The wan stars danced between.

“And the coming wind did roar more loud,
And the sails did sigh like sedge;³¹
320 And the rain poured down from one
black cloud;
The Moon was at its edge.

28. **silly** empty.

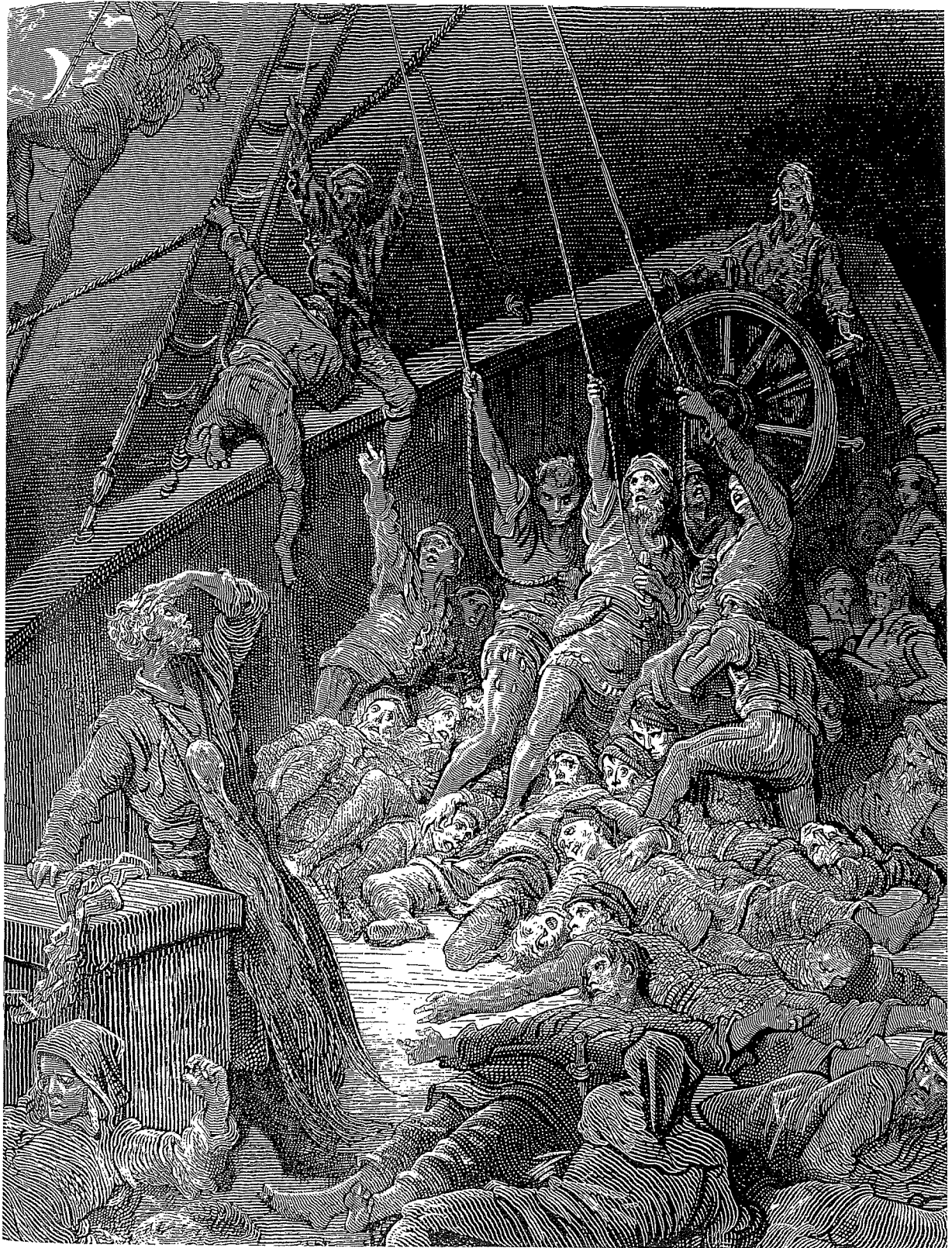
29. **sere** dried up.

30. **fire flags sheen** the aurora australis, or southern lights, shone.

31. **sedge** *n.* rushlike plant that grows in wet soil.

Literary Analysis
Poetic Sound Devices
and the Language of the
Fantastic What does the
connection of the two
events in lines 288–291
add to the fairy-tale
quality of the story?

Literary Analysis
Poetic Sound Devices
Which repeated
consonant sound in
lines 303–304 creates
alliteration?



Engraving by Gustave Doré for "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

▲ **Critical Viewing** Which details support the mood of hopelessness in this illustration? [Support]

“The thick black cloud was cleft, and still
The Moon was at its side:
Like waters shot from some high crag,
325 The lightning fell with never a jag,
A river steep and wide.

*The bodies of the
ship’s crew are
inspired³² and the
ship moves on;*

“The loud wind never reached the ship,
Yet now the ship moved on!
Beneath the lightning and the Moon
330 The dead men gave a groan.

“They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;
It had been strange, even in a dream,
To have seen those dead men rise.

335 “The helmsman steered, the ship moved on:
Yet never a breeze up-blew;
The mariners all ’gan work the ropes,
Where they were wont³³ to do;
They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—
340 We were a ghastly crew.

“The body of my brother’s son
Stood by me, knee to knee;
The body and I pulled at one rope,
But he said nought to me.”

*But not by the souls
of the men, nor by
demons of earth or
middle air, but by
a blessed troop of
angelic spirits,
sent down by the
invocation of the
guardian saint.*

345 “I fear thee, ancient Mariner!”
“Be calm, thou Wedding Guest!
’Twas not those souls that fled in pain,
Which to their corses³⁴ came again,
But a troop of spirits blessed:

350 “For when it dawned—they dropped their arms,
And clustered round the mast;
Sweet sounds rose slowly through
their mouths,
And from their bodies passed.

“Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
355 Then darted to the Sun;
Slowly the sounds came back again,
Now mixed, now one by one.

Literary Analysis
Poetic Sound Devices
Find an example of
assonance—the repetition
of vowel sounds in
unrhymed syllables—in
lines 331–334.

Literary Analysis
Poetic Sound Devices
Find an example of
alliteration—the repetitio
of initial consonant
sounds—in lines 350–353

32. **inspired** inspirited
33. **wont** accustomed.
34. **corses** corpses.

“Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
I heard the skylark sing;
360 Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seemed to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning!³⁵

“And now ’twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
365 And now it is an angel’s song,
That makes the heavens be mute.

“It ceased; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
370 In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

“Till noon we quietly sailed on,
Yet never a breeze did breathe;
375 Slowly and smoothly went the ship,
Moved onward from beneath.

“Under the keel nine fathom deep,
From the land of mist and snow,
The spirit slid; and it was he
380 That made the ship to go.
The sails at noon left off their tune,
And the ship stood still also.

“The Sun, right up above the mast,
Had fixed her to the ocean:
385 But in a minute she ’gan stir,
With a short uneasy motion—
Backwards and forwards half her length
With a short uneasy motion.

“Then like a pawing horse let go,
390 She made a sudden bound:
It flung the blood into my head,
And I fell down in a swoond.


“How long in that same fit I lay,
I have not to declare;
395 But ere my living life returned,

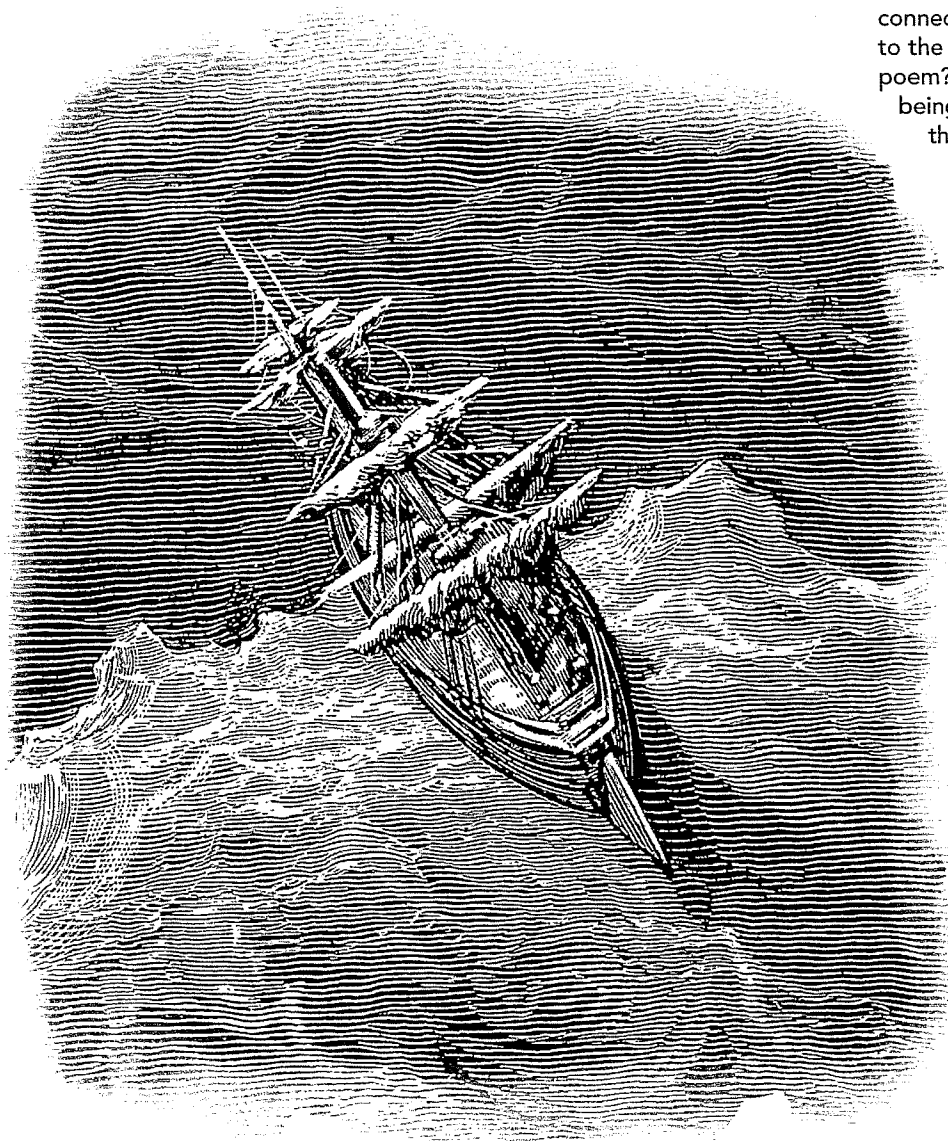
*The lonesome Spirit
from the South Pole
carries on the ship
as far as the Line,
in obedience to the
angelic troop, but
still requireth
vengeance.*

*The Polar Spirit’s
fellow demons, the
invisible inhabitants
of the element, take
part in his wrong;
and two of them
relate, one to the
other, that penance
long and heavy for
the ancient Mariner
hath been accorded
to the Polar Spirit,
who returneth
southward.*

35. jargoning singing.

Reading Strategy
Analyzing Poetic Effects
How does the alliteration
in lines 373–376 enhance
the description of the
boat’s smooth progress?

 **Reading Check**
What happens to the
bodies of the Mariner’s
shipmates?



Engraving by Gustave Doré for "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

◀ **Critical Viewing**
How closely can you connect this illustration to the events in the poem? Is the image being portrayed from the Ancient Mariner's point of view? Why or why not?
[Connect]

I heard and in my soul discerned
Two voices in the air.

“Is it he?” quoth one, “Is this the man?
By him who died on cross,
400 With his cruel bow he laid full low
The harmless Albatross.

“The spirit who bideth by himself
In the land of mist and snow,

He loved the bird that loved the man
405 Who shot him with his bow.'

"The other was a softer voice,
As soft as honeydew:
Quoth he, 'The man hath penance done,
And penance more will do.'

Part VI

FIRST VOICE

410 "But tell me, tell me! speak again,
Thy soft response renewing—
What makes that ship drive on so fast?
What is the ocean doing?'

SECOND VOICE

"Still as a slave before his lord,
415 The ocean hath no blast;
His great bright eye most silently
Up to the Moon is cast—

"If he may know which way to go;
For she guides him smooth or grim.
420 See, brother, see! how graciously
She looketh down on him.'

FIRST VOICE

"But why drives on that ship so fast,
Without or wave or wind?'

SECOND VOICE

"The air is cut away before,
425 And closes from behind.

"Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high!
Or we shall be belated;
For slow and slow that ship will go,
When the Mariner's trance is abated.'

430 "I woke, and we were sailing on
As in a gentle weather:
'Twas night, calm night, the moon was high;
The dead men stood together.

"All stood together on the deck,
435 For a charnel dungeon³⁶ litter;

*The Mariner hath
been cast into a
trance; for the
angelic power
causeth the vessel
to drive northward
faster than human
life could endure.*

*The super-natural
motion is retarded;
the Mariner awakes,
and his penance
begins anew.*

36. charnel dungeon vault where corpses or bones are deposited.

Literary Analysis
**Poetic Sound Devices and
the Language of Fantasy**
How do the two voices
contribute to Coleridge's
creation of a dream
world?

Literary Analysis
Poetic Sound Devices
What instance of
assonance can you find
in lines 414–417?

Reading Check

What do the two voices
discuss?

All fixed on me their stony eyes,
That in the Moon did glitter.

“The pang, the curse, with which they died,
Had never passed away;
440 I could not draw my eyes from theirs,
Nor turn them up to pray.

*The curse is
finally expiated.*

“And now this spell was snapped; once more
I viewed the ocean green,
And looked far forth, yet little saw
445 Of what had else been seen—

“Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
450 Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

“But soon there breathed a wind on me,
Nor sound nor motion made:
Its path was not upon the sea,
455 In ripple or in shade.

“It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring—
It mingled strangely with my fears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

460 “Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
Yet she sailed softly too:
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—
On me alone it blew.

*And the ancient
Mariner beholdeth
his native country.*

“Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed
465 The lighthouse top I see?
Is this the hill? is this the kirk?
Is this mine own countree?

“We drifted o’er the harbor bar,
And I with sobs did pray—
470 O let me be awake, my God!
Or let me sleep away.

“The harbor bay was clear as glass,
So smoothly it was strewn!³⁷

expiated (ēk’ spē āt’ əd) *v.*
atoned; made amends for,
especially by suffering

Literary Analysis
Poetic Sound Devices
Find the assonance
and alliteration in lines
460–463.

37. strewn spread.

And on the bay the moonlight lay,
475 And the shadow of the Moon.

“The rock shone bright, the kirk
no less,
That stands above the rock;
The moonlight steeped in silentness
The steady weathercock.

480 “And the bay was white with
silent light,
Till rising from the same,
Full many shapes, that shadows were,
In crimson colors came.

*The angelic spirits
leave the dead
bodies,*

*And appear in their
own forms of light.*

“A little distance from the prow
485 Those crimson shadows were;
I turned my eyes upon the deck—
Oh, Christ! what saw I there!

“Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,
And, by the holy rood!³⁸
490 A man all light, a seraph³⁹ man,
On every corse there stood.

“This seraph band, each waved
his hand:
It was a heavenly sight!
They stood as signals to the land,
495 Each one a lovely light;

“This seraph band, each waved
his hand,
No voice did they impart—
No voice; but oh! the silence sank
Like music on my heart.

500 “But soon I heard the dash of oars,
I heard the Pilot’s cheer;
My head was turned perforce away
And I saw a boat appear.

“The Pilot and the Pilot’s boy,
505 I heard them coming fast:

38. rood cross.

39. seraph angel.

The British Tradition



The Tradition of Fantasy

Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

—written in a dreamlike

language, set in an indeterminate past, and filled with supernatural events—is part of the British tradition of fantasy literature. Writers of works of fantasy set out to create a realm distinct from the everyday world of their readers—a never-never land ruled by strange laws.

The fantasy tradition began as long ago as Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, (p. 176), which is set in a vanished past that had become a myth by Malory’s own day. The idea of a vanished past fascinated writers long after Malory, reappearing in the work of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, who resorted to Arthurian and mythological elements in many poems, as in “The Lady of Shalott” (p. 821)

Fantasy writers such as Coleridge use strange settings and supernatural tales to break the spell of ordinary life. By plunging us into a wild, unfamiliar world, they remind us that human imagination can always envision worlds beyond the one into which we are born—a power that enables scientific discoveries and social reforms as well as great poetry.

✓ Reading Check

What place does the Mariner sail near?

Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy
The dead men could not blast.

“I saw a third—I heard his voice:
It is the Hermit good!
510 He singeth loud his godly hymns
That he makes in the wood.
He’ll shrieve⁴⁰ my soul, he’ll
wash away
The Albatross’s blood.

Part VII

*The Hermit of
the Wood,*

“This Hermit good lives in that wood
515 Which slopes down to the sea.
How loudly his sweet voice he rears!
He loves to talk with mariners
That come from a far countree.

“He kneels at morn, and noon,
and eve—
520 He hath a cushion plump:
It is the moss that wholly hides
The rotted old oak-stump.

“The skiff boat neared; I heard them talk.
‘Why, this is strange, I trow!⁴¹
525 Where are those lights so many and fair,
That signal made but now?’

*Approacheth the
ship with wonder.*

“‘Strange, by my faith!’ the Hermit said—
‘And they answered not our cheer!
The planks looked warped! and see those sails,
530 How thin they are and sere!
I never saw aught like to them,
Unless perchance it were

“‘Brown skeletons of leaves that lag
My forest brook along;
535 When the ivy tod⁴² is heavy with snow,
And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,
That eats the she-wolf’s young.’

“‘Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look’
(The Pilot made reply)

Reading Strategy
Analyzing Poetic Effects
These lines are less crowded with sound devices than the lines describing the Mariner’s nightmarish sea journey. How does this shift in language match the shift in mood?

Literary Analysis
Poetic Sound Devices and the Language of Fantasy
Which word in lines 523–526 might Coleridge have borrowed from medieval tales of knights?

40. **shrieve** (shrēv) absolve from sin.

41. **trow** believe.

42. **tod** bush.

540 'I am a-feared'—'Push on, push on!'
Said the Hermit cheerily.

"The boat came closer to the ship,
But I nor spake nor stirred;
The boat came close beneath the ship,
545 And straight⁴³ a sound was heard.

*The ship suddenly
sinketh.*

"Under the water it rumbled on,
Still louder and more dread;
It reached the ship, it split the bay;
The ship went down like lead.

*The ancient Mariner
is saved in the
Pilot's boat.*

550 "Stunned by that loud and dreadful sound,
Which sky and ocean smote,
Like one that hath been seven days drowned
My body lay afloat;
But swift as dreams, myself I found
555 Within the Pilot's boat.

"Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,
The boat spun round and round;
And all was still, save that the hill
Was telling of the sound.

560 "I moved my lips—the Pilot shrieked
And fell down in a fit;
The holy Hermit raised his eyes,
And prayed where he did sit.

"I took the oars; the Pilot's boy,
565 Who now doth crazy go,
Laughed loud and long, and all the while
His eyes went to and fro.
'Ha! ha!' quoth he, 'full plain I see,
The Devil knows how to row.'

570 "And now, all in my own countree,
I stood on the firm land!
The Hermit stepped forth from the boat,
And scarcely he could stand.

*The ancient Mariner
earnestly entreateth
the Hermit to
shrieve him; and the
penance of life falls
on him.*

"O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!"
575 The Hermit crossed his brow.⁴⁴

43. **straight** immediately.

44. **crossed his brow** made the sign of the cross on his forehead.

Reading Strategy
Analyzing Poetic Effects
Which poetic effects
contribute to the impact
of lines 556–559?

 **Reading Check**

Who helps the Mariner
when the ship sinks?

'Say, quick,' quoth he, 'I bid thee say—
What manner of man art thou?'

"Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With a woeful agony,
580 Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free.

*And ever and
anon throughout
his future life an
agony constraineth
him to travel from
land to land;*

"Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns;
And till my ghastly tale is told,
585 This heart within me burns.

"I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
590 To him my tale I teach.

"What loud uproar bursts from that door!
The wedding guests are there;
But in the garden bower the bride
And bridesmaids singing are;
595 And hark the little vesper bell,
Which biddeth me to prayer!

"O Wedding Guest! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea:
So lonely 'twas, that God himself
600 Scarce seemed there to be.

"O sweeter than the marriage feast,
'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company!—

605 "To walk together to the kirk,
And all together pray,
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends
And youths and maidens gay!

*And to teach, by his
own example, love
and reverence to all
things that God
made and loveth.*

610 "Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

Reading Strategy
Analyzing Poetic Effects

What effect does the alliteration in line 590 featuring *tale*—a word that appears in each of the preceding two stanzas—have?

reverence (rĕv' er ens) *n.*
deep respect

“He prayeth best, who loveth best
615 All things both great and small:
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.”

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar,
620 Is gone; and now the Wedding Guest
Turned from the bridegroom’s door.

He went like one that hath been stunned
And is of sense forlorn;
A sadder and a wiser man,
625 He rose the morrow morn.

Review and Assess

Thinking About the Selection

1. **Respond:** How did your reaction to the ancient Mariner change as his story went on? Explain.
2. (a) **Recall:** On what occasion does the Mariner tell his story?
(b) **Interpret:** Why do you think Coleridge choose this occasion for the poem?
3. (a) **Recall:** What contradictory connections does the crew make between the Albatross and the weather? (b) **Recall:** What does the Mariner do to the Albatross? (c) **Infer:** Why does the Mariner wear the Albatross around his neck?
4. (a) **Recall:** What happens to the Mariner’s shipmates after the appearance of the Specter Woman and her Death-mate?
(b) **Generalize:** What might this symbolize about the effect of guilt on an individual’s perceptions of and relations with others?
5. (a) **Infer:** Why does the Albatross finally fall from the Mariner’s neck? (b) **Interpret:** What do you think the Albatross symbolizes? Find evidence to support your answer.
6. (a) **Recall:** What is the Mariner’s lifelong penance?
(b) **Analyze:** How does his story affect his listener?
(c) **Draw Conclusions:** What larger lesson about human life might his story suggest?
7. **Take a Position:** In today’s world, people who have been through harrowing experiences often tell their stories in books and on talk shows, just as the Mariner tells the story of his trials. Do you think this type of response is appropriate? Explain.