Anglo Saxons: ‘The Ruin’

Notes to teachers

There are two versions of the poem, the lower KS2 version having simpler vocabulary in parts.

The poetry response questions can be used throughout KS2. The comprehension questions include more sophisticated questions which could be adapted for lower KS2, or used for more able pupils.

The poem’s ending is lost, because the manuscript was scorched. The references to baths might lead you to think of Bath, but as most Roman cities had baths, it is possible that it refers to another city.

The poem can also be used to complete the follow up activity ‘My Ruin’.
**Anglo Saxons: ‘The Ruin’**

**Poetry response questions**

What do you like about the poem?
What do you not like about the poem?
What particular words or phrases did you enjoy?
What do you think the poem is about?
Why do you think the poem ends in the way it does?

**Comprehension questions**

What city might this be? What clues does the poet give?
Find three examples of alliteration.
What does the poem say caused the city to be deserted?
How long ago does the poet say that the city was built?
What does ‘the earth’s embrace...holds the mighty craftsmen’ mean?
What phrases does the poet use to make us aware that the city was a wonderful place before it was ruined?
What other word could the poet have used instead of ‘wrecked’ in the first line? Why is ‘wrecked’ such a good word in this line?
Does the poet admire the ruins? What words are used to express this?
Is it a sad poem or a happy poem? Why do you think that?
The Ruin (Lower KS2)

Wondrous is this stone-wall, wrecked by fate; the city-buildings crumble, the works of the giants fall. Roofs have caved in, towers collapsed, barred gates are broken, hoar frost clings to stone, houses are gaping, tottering and fallen, eaten away by age. The earth’s embrace, its fierce grip, holds the mighty craftsmen; they are dead and gone. A hundred generations have passed away since then. This wall, grey with lichen and red of stone, outlives kingdom after kingdom, stood against storms; its tall gate fallen. The city still moulders, gashed by storms...

A man’s mind grew lively with a plan; sharp and strong-willed, he bound the foundations with metal rods – a marvel. Bright were the city halls, many the bath-houses, high all the gables, great the soldiers’ clamour, many a mead hall was full of delights until fate the mighty changed it. Slaughtered men fell far and wide, the plague-days came, death removed every brave man. Their ramparts became abandoned places, the city decayed; warriors and builders fell to the earth. So these courts crumble, and this red stone arch sheds tiles.

The place falls to ruin, shattered into mounds of stone, where once many a man, joyous and gold-bright, dressed in splendour, proud and flushed with wine, gleamed in his armour; he gazed on his treasure – silver, precious stones, jewellery and wealth, all that he owned – and on this bright city in the wide kingdom. Stone houses stood here; a hot spring gushed in a wide stream; a stone wall enclosed the bright rooms; the baths were there, the heated water; that was convenient. They allowed the steaming water to pour over the grey stone into the circular pool. Hot...

... where the baths were ... that is a noble thing, how the ... the city.

Adapted from: Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo Saxon World, An Anthology* (OUP 2009)
The Ruin (Upper KS2)

Wondrous is this stone-wall, wrecked by fate; the city-buildings crumble, the works of the giants decay. Roofs have caved in, towers collapsed, barred gates are broken, hoar frost clings to mortar, houses are gaping, tottering and fallen, undermined by age. The earth’s embrace, its fierce grip, holds the mighty craftsmen; they are perished and gone. A hundred generations have passed away since then. This wall, grey with lichen and red of hue, outlives kingdom after kingdom, withstands tempests; its tall gate succumbed. The city still moulders, gashed by storms...

A man’s mind quickened with a plan; subtle and strong-willed, he bound the foundations with metal rods – a marvel. Bright were the city halls, many the bath-houses, lofty all the gables, great the martial clamour, many a mead hall was full of delights until fate the mighty altered it. Slaughtered men fell far and wide, the plague-days came, death removed every brave man. Their ramparts became abandoned places, the city decayed; warriors and builders fell to the earth. Thus these courts crumble, and this redstone arch sheds tiles.

The place falls to ruin, shattered into mounds of stone, where once many a man, joyous and gold-bright, dressed in splendour, proud and flushed with wine, gleamed in his armour; he gazed on his treasure – silver, precious stones, jewellery and wealth, all that he owned – and on this bright city in the broad kingdom. Stone houses stood here; a hot spring gushed in a wide stream; a stone wall enclosed the bright interior; the baths were there, the heated water; that was convenient. They allowed the scalding water to pour over the grey stone into the circular pool. Hot...

................... where the baths were ................... that is a noble thing, how the ................... the city.

[Kevin Crossley-Holland, The Anglo Saxon World, An Anthology (OUP 2009)]