



TEACHER'S NOTES ON UNDER MILK WOOD

- **Under Milk Wood** was completed by the writer Dylan Thomas when he was over in New York in 1953, where he died aged 39.
- The play was performed first in 1954 on the BBC, and Dylan Thomas called it a 'play for voices'.
- The play invites us to listen in on the dreams of the people of the imaginary village of Llareggub – a jokey name which spells out 'bugger all' when read backwards. A sketched map of the village by Dylan Thomas is held in the collections of the National Library at Aberystwyth. This can be seen online on <http://centenary.llgc.org.uk/en/XCM1947/book/2/1/1.html>
- Many believe that the play is partly based on the village of Laugharne in Carmarthenshire where Dylan would often visit and where he also lived. He is buried in the church there. Others say it was influenced by the little town of New Quay in west Wales which was another area where Dylan spent much time.
- The play opens with a very well-known opening, setting the scene of the village at night with its inhabitants asleep just as day breaks. You can hear Dylan Thomas reading this opening on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjJt4P4w8io>
- Dylan Thomas was famous for his reading of his work, and the sound of words is a powerful element of his style as a poet and writer. He creates a picture of the dark blackness and stillness of the night, but also portrays the sleeping community of Llareggub with all the different occupations of the people who live there.
- The voice introduces us to the village and to the character of Captain Cat, the blind sea captain who hears the voices of his dear dead friends in his dreams. He listens to the village waking up, and we are invited to listen in to their dreams too.
- The play is full of entertaining characters who are both quarrelsome and flirtatious, immoral, respectable, fussy and nagging. In this variety and in the detailed description of the surroundings, there is a good deal of humour. Their language is both poetic and the language of everyday life, and Dylan Thomas has created his characters with much affection for their weaknesses, as well as poking a little fun at them. He has captured different kinds of people in a small village and shows them going about their daily business, with all the worries and anxieties and laughter of their lives captured in dialogue and songs.



- Among the characters are Polly Garter, who pines for her dead lover, the nagging Mrs Ogmores Pritchard, with her husbands Mr Ogmores and Mr Pritchard, Dai Bread with his wives, Mrs Dai Bread One and Mrs Dai Bread Two – one very homely and comfortable, and the other much more glamorous. Mr Pugh plots to kill Mrs Pugh, and Lily Smalls admires herself in the mirror. Mr Mog Edwards is a 'draper, mad for love' and Willy Nilly the postman reads everybody's letters on his rounds.
- There have been film versions of the play – one was made in Fishguard in Pembrokeshire, with Richard Burton playing the role of the narrator. There is also an animated version.