The Listeners
by Walter de la Mare

“Is there anybody there?” said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed* the grasses
Of the forest’s ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,*
Above the Traveller’s head:
And he smote* upon the door again a second time;
“Is there anybody there?” he said.
But no one descended to the Traveller;
No head from the leaf-fringed sill
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
Where he stood perplexed and still.
But only a host* of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
To that voice from the world of men:
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
That goes down to the empty hall,
Hearkening* in an air stirred and shaken
By the lonely Traveller’s call.
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
Their stillness answering his cry,
While his horse moved, cropping* the dark turf,
‘Neath the starred and leafy sky;
For he suddenly smote on the door, even
Louder, and lifted his head:—
“Tell them I came, and no one answered,
That I kept my word,” he said.
Never the least stir made the listeners,
Though every word he spake*
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
From the one man left awake:
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward,
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

DEFINITIONS:  
CHAMPED: Another word for chomped
TURRET: A small tower on top of a larger tower or at the corner of a building or wall, typically of a castle.
SMOTE: Past tense of smite, an old-fashioned word for striking with a firm blow
HOST: A large group
HEARKENING: Listening
CROPPING: Cutting or harvesting
SPAKE: An old-fashioned word that means spoke
1. Summarize the poem in your own words.
2. What is the setting of the poem?
3. What kind of poem is this?
4. Find examples of the following poetic sound devices:
   a. Alliteration
   b. Assonance
   c. Consonance
   d. Rhyme
5. What is the effect of the bird rising from the turret?
6. What is the effect of the horse’s presence in the poem?
7. Discuss the poet’s use of imagery. Why is it effective?
8. What is the atmosphere of the poem? How is it developed?
9. Why didn’t the poet call the poem “The Traveller” or something else? Why is the title an effective one?
10. Contrast the “host of phantom listeners” to the living beings in the poem.
11. What questions remain unanswered after reading the poem? What is the effect of having unanswered questions? What might some possible answers be?
12. Illustrate the poem in the space below.