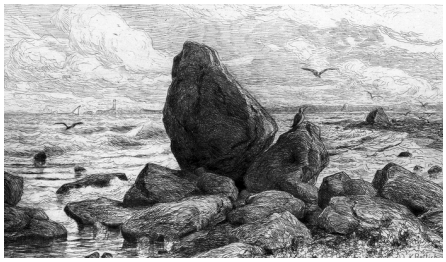
Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



# A Dream Within a Dream

*by Edgar Allan Poe*

Grades 8–11 · Common Core RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.5

Poe published the final version of the poem in 1849, the year he died. He had lost his mother, his foster mother and his wife Virginia to illness, and loss runs through his poetry. The poem has two stanzas: a farewell to a loved one, and a scene on a stormy shore.

## THE POEM

Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow--
You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream:
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision or in none,
Is it therefore the less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand--
How few! yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep
While I weep--while I weep!
O God! can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is all that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?

## VOCABULARY

**brow** — forehead

**avow** — declare, state openly

**deem** — think, believe

**vision** — something seen in a dream or the imagination

**surf-tormented** — battered by crashing waves

**creep** — move slowly

**grasp** — hold firmly

**clasp** — a tight hold

**pitiless** — showing no mercy

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is happening in stanza 1? Who is the speaker talking to?

2. What does the speaker admit that the other person is "not wrong" about?

3. What does the speaker hold in his hand in stanza 2, and what happens to it?

4. What might the grains of sand stand for?

5. How is the line about "a dream within a dream" different at the end of each stanza? Why does that change matter?

## WRITING PROMPT

Write a poem of two stanzas about something you wish you could hold on to. In stanza 1, describe it; in stanza 2, use one strong image of it slipping away.

# A Dream Within a Dream — Answer Key

1. The speaker is parting from someone he loves, giving a kiss “upon the brow.”
2. That his days “have been a dream”: his life has felt unreal; hope has “flown away.”
3. “Grains of the golden sand”; they “creep / Through my fingers to the deep” while he weeps.
4. Time, moments of life, people he loves: precious things he cannot keep.
5. Stanza 1 states it: “All that we see or seem / Is but a dream within a dream.” Stanza 2 turns it into a question: “Is all that we see or seem / But a dream within a dream?” His certainty becomes doubt and desperation.

*Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/a-dream-within-a-dream-edgar-allan-poe/*