

Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

Ozymandias

by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Grades 9–12 · Common Core RL.9–10.4, RL.9–10.2, RL.9–10.5

Shelley published “Ozymandias” in January 1818. Ozymandias is the Greek name for the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II. The poem is a sonnet that mixes Petrarchan and Shakespearean rhyme patterns, and it is told through layers of voices: the speaker, a traveler, the sculptor and the king himself.



THE POEM

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert...Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
5 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
10 ‘My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

VOCABULARY

antique — ancient**trunkless** — without a body or torso**visage** — face**sneer** — a scornful, mocking expression**mocked** — imitated (in stone); also ridiculed**pedestal** — the base a statue stands on**colossal** — huge**boundless** — without limits

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who are the different speakers in the poem? Who tells the story to whom?

2. What does the statue's face reveal about Ozymandias as a ruler?

3. What does Ozymandias want the "Mighty" to feel when they see his works? What do visitors actually see?

4. What is ironic about the inscription on the pedestal?

5. What is the poem saying about power and time? Do you think it still applies today?

WRITING PROMPT

Imagine a modern building, brand or famous person 3,000 years from now. Write a poem of 10–14 lines describing what is left of it and what a traveler might think.

Ozymandias — Answer Key

1. The speaker (“I”) met a traveler from an ancient land, who describes the statue; the sculptor’s skill and the king’s own words on the pedestal add more voices.
2. “frown, / And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command” show he was proud, harsh and arrogant.
3. He wanted them to despair because they could never equal his works. Instead, “Nothing beside remains,” only a broken statue and empty sand.
4. He meant it as a boast, but now it reads as a warning: even his great works have vanished, so the mighty should despair that their power will fade too.
5. All power and human achievement are temporary; time and nature outlast them. Accept supported modern examples.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/ozymandias-percy-bysshe-shelley/