

“Ozymandias of Egypt” by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Textual Questions & Answers – Ozymandias of Egypt

I. Understanding the Poem

1. Who is the speaker in the poem?

→ The speaker is the poet himself, Percy Bysshe Shelley, who tells the story narrated to him by a traveller from an ancient land.

2. What did the traveller see in the desert?

→ The traveller saw the broken statue of a once-great king in the vast desert—two huge legs standing without a torso and a shattered face half-buried in the sand.

3. What kind of expression did the face have?

→ The face had a frown, wrinkled lip, and a sneer of cold command—reflecting arrogance and pride.

4. What does the inscription on the pedestal say?

→ The inscription read:

“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!”

5. What remains around the statue?

→ Nothing remains—just boundless and bare sands stretching far away.

6. What message does the poem convey?

→ The poem highlights the impermanence of power and the inevitable decline of all empires and rulers.



◆ **Short Answer Type (30–50 words)**

1. **Who was Ozymandias?**

→ Ozymandias was an ancient Egyptian king (another name for Ramses II), portrayed as a powerful and arrogant ruler whose empire has now crumbled into ruins.

2. **What is ironic about the inscription on the statue?**

→ The irony lies in the king's boast about his greatness, but all that remains of his empire is a broken statue in a deserted wasteland.

3. **What is the theme of the poem?**

→ The major theme is the transience of human power and pride, and how nature and time ultimately erase all man-made glories.

4. **What literary devices are used in the poem?**

→ The poem uses imagery, irony, alliteration, and a frame narrative. The statue symbolizes the fallen glory of empires.

5. **Why is the setting of the poem important?**

→ The desolate desert emphasizes the contrast between Ozymandias's claimed greatness and the forgotten state of his kingdom.

6. **How is the sculptor important in the poem?**

→ The sculptor captured the king's arrogant expression so well that it still remains, showing that art can outlast power.

7. **What does "colossal wreck" suggest?**

→ It refers to the broken remains of the statue, symbolizing the ruin of Ozymandias's once-mighty empire.

8. **What lesson does the poem offer modern readers?**

→ The poem warns against hubris and pride, reminding readers that time will eventually erase even the greatest of achievements.

9. What is the tone of the poem?

→ The tone is ironic, reflective, and somewhat melancholic as it contemplates the decline of power.

10. Why is the poem relevant today?

→ It reminds us that technological and political achievements are temporary, and pride often leads to downfall.

◆ **Long Answer Type (100–150 words)**

11. Discuss the theme of decay in “Ozymandias.”

→ “Ozymandias” reflects on how even the most powerful civilizations eventually fade away. The once-mighty king’s statue now lies broken in the desert, with no trace of his grand empire. The poem reveals that time is the ultimate conqueror. All human pride and power are temporary, and even monuments cannot withstand the erosion of time. Shelley uses vivid imagery and irony to portray the decay of Ozymandias’s legacy, warning readers against excessive pride.

12. Explain the use of irony in the poem.

→ Irony is central to “Ozymandias.” The inscription boasts of the king’s greatness: “Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!”—but ironically, there are no works left to see. The statue lies in ruins, and the surrounding desert is empty. This contrast between Ozymandias’s arrogance and the reality of decay delivers a powerful message about the futility of human pride.

13. How does Shelley use imagery to enhance the poem’s message?

→ Shelley uses strong visual imagery: “Two vast and trunkless legs of stone,” “shattered visage,” and “boundless and bare.” These images paint a clear picture of the ruined statue in an

endless desert. The desolate imagery reinforces the idea that time erases even the greatest accomplishments and supports the poem's theme of impermanence.

14. **Compare Ozymandias to a modern-day figure or ruler.**

What lessons can be drawn?

→ Like Ozymandias, many modern rulers build monuments and flaunt power. However, just as Ozymandias's empire faded, today's leaders too will be forgotten unless they focus on meaningful, lasting contributions. The lesson is that true greatness comes not from pride, but from humility and service.

15. **How does the structure of the poem contribute to its meaning?**

→ The poem is a sonnet, but it mixes elements of both the Petrarchan and Shakespearean styles. This unique structure symbolizes the breakdown of traditional forms—just as Ozymandias's statue has crumbled. The framing device (a traveller narrating) distances the reader, reinforcing the sense of ancient history and forgotten power.