For this activity, follow each step as I guide you through your reading and understanding of this poem. If the explanation before the question asks you to highlight something, make sure you do that. If the explanation before just asks you to think, make sure you do that. To indicate an answer, **BOLD** your choice.

| 5  10  15  20  25 | **WHAT ARE YEARS?**  What is our innocence,  what is our guilt? All are  naked, none is safe. And whence  is courage: the unanswered question,  the resolute doubt,—  dumbly calling, deafly listening—that  in misfortune, even death,  encourages others  and in its defeat, stirs  the soul to be strong? He  sees deep and is glad, who  accedes to mortality  and in his imprisonment rises  upon himself as  the sea in a chasm, struggling to be  free and unable to be,  in its surrendering  finds its continuing.  So he who strongly feels,  behaves. The very bird,  grown taller as he sings, steels[[1]](#footnote-0)  his form straight up. Though he is captive,  his mighty singing  says, satisfaction is a lowly  thing, how pure a thing is joy.  This is mortality,  this is eternity.  *Marianne Moore* (1887–1972). | Before you answer the first question, read the poem and highlight which of these options fits with what subject the poem is mostly about: JUDGEMENT/IGNORANCE  GUILT/INNOCENCE  PRISON/FREEDOM  DEATH/LIFE  To confirm you have the right answer, highlight 3 mentions in the poem that match that choice, one in each stanza. Hint: one of these is a metaphor for another. Don’t choose the metaphor.  Now, your answer to the previous question is the “context” for the next question. Without the context, each of the choices are entirely possible. With the context, only one is. **Now choose.**   1. In context, the statement “All are / naked, none is safe” (lines 2 to 3) reinforces the poem’s central idea regarding our    1. **inescapable mortality**    2. personal shortcomings    3. vulnerability to the judgements of others    4. vulnerability in the face of hostile circumstances   For the second question, there are two parts to each choice. For the first half, keep in mind that *cultivating* means nurturing and developing, *persevering* means pushing through, and *devoting* means committing to. For the second half, in lines 1-10 can you find *caution*, *no-faults*, *limitations*, or *the less fortunate*? Note: b. and c. are opposites. Can you see that? **Now choose.**   1. In lines 1 to 10, the poet suggests that inner strength arises from    1. cultivating caution    2. living a faultless life    3. **persevering despite our limitations**    4. devoting ourselves to the less fortunate |
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| 5  10  15  20  25 | **WHAT ARE YEARS?**  What is our innocence,  what is our guilt? All are  naked, none is safe. And whence  is courage: the unanswered question,  the resolute doubt,—  dumbly calling, deafly listening—that  in misfortune, even death,  encourages others  and in its defeat, stirs  the soul to be strong? He  sees deep and is glad, who  accedes to mortality  and in his imprisonment rises  upon himself as  the sea in a chasm, struggling to be  free and unable to be,  in its surrendering  finds its continuing.  So he who strongly feels,  behaves. The very bird,  grown taller as he sings, steels[[2]](#footnote-1)  his form straight up. Though he is captive,  his mighty singing  says, satisfaction is a lowly  thing, how pure a thing is joy.  This is mortality,  this is eternity.  *Marianne Moore* (1887–1972). | This next question is another context question. Of course, some of you will just know this word, but that isn’t the point here. The context tells you which answer is right. No dictionary needed.  The sentence that “accedes to” (line 12) belongs to is nine lines long. If I write it like one sentence, without the line breaks, it stops looking like a scary poem and starts looking like a regular, albeit annoyingly cryptic sentence: “He sees deep and is glad, who accedes to mortality and in his imprisonment rises upon himself as the sea in a chasm, struggling to be free and unable to be, in its surrendering finds its continuing.”  So, if he does all that struggling against the prison and ultimately gives up, he’ll discover a good thing. **Which one of these choices** means *giving up and letting it happen*?   1. In context of the poem, “accedes to” (line 12) means    1. fears    2. seeks    3. **accepts**    4. promotes   This question is about part of line 19, but the “So” at the beginning tells us this is summing up the previous sentence, which means the *he* here is the *he* there. **Which one of these choices** matches the he who “sees deep and is glad,” is “struggling to be / free,” and is “surrendering / [to] find” meaning because those are all indeed strong feelings?   1. The quotation “he who strongly feels” (line 19) refers to the person who    1. **is fully engaged with life**    2. takes comfort in security    3. is emotionally indifferent    4. devises strategies for communication |
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| 5  10  15  20  25 | **WHAT ARE YEARS?**  What is our innocence,  what is our guilt? All are  naked, none is safe. And whence  is courage: the unanswered question,  the resolute doubt,—  dumbly calling, deafly listening—that  in misfortune, even death,  encourages others  and in its defeat, stirs  the soul to be strong? He  sees deep and is glad, who  accedes to mortality  and in his imprisonment rises  upon himself as  the sea in a chasm, struggling to be  free and unable to be,  in its surrendering  finds its continuing.  So he who strongly feels,  behaves. The very bird,  grown taller as he sings, steels[[3]](#footnote-2)  his form straight up. Though he is captive,  his mighty singing  says, satisfaction is a lowly  thing, how pure a thing is joy.  This is mortality,  this is eternity.  *Marianne Moore* (1887–1972). | Sometimes you just need to know what a word is, like “duty” (*obligation*) or “humility” (*quality of being humble*) or “lightheartedness” (*having a light heart… duh*). But other times, you can figure a word out because of all of its pieces:   | IR | RE | PRESS | IBIL | ITY | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | *can’t* | *again* | *push down* | *able* | *(makes it a noun)* |   So, irrepressibility describes something that *doesn’t have the ability to be pushed down again and again* or in other words it *can’t be held back or stopped*.  Considering this, and the highlighting that matches the stem of the question, **which of these fits best?**   1. The word choice in lines 19 to 25 reinforces the concept of    1. duty (*obligation*)    2. humility (*quality of being humble*)    3. **irrepressibility (*can’t be held back or stopped*)**    4. lightheartedness (*having a light heart… duh*)   I’ve summed up the meaning of each couplet to help you make your choice for the next question. In order to learn here, compare what I did to the highlighted poem. Then **make your choice**.  *Couplet one: encouraging defeat*  *Couplet two: surrendering leads to continuing*  *Couplet three: mortality is eternity*   1. The couplets at the end of each stanza reinforce the idea that    1. happiness is an illusion    2. **existence is paradoxical**    3. opposite experiences cannot be reconciled    4. death does not erase the memory of a person |
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This is the final question. Since this asks you to consider the same space as you did for question 5, your answer here should match your answer there. **Choose the one** that matches the feeling of this metaphorical bird who “though he is captive” keeps singing and standing tall. Also, remember that this is a theme question (as final questions often are), so you might want to check over your answers and make sure that you have a set that fits together.

1. In lines 20 to 25, the image of the bird **mainly** reinforces the idea that
   1. **life is for living**
   2. life is fraught with hazards
   3. determination often falters
   4. our best efforts are ineffectual

1. steels — braces or strengthens, reinvigorates [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. steels — braces or strengthens, reinvigorates [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. steels — braces or strengthens, reinvigorates [↑](#footnote-ref-2)