



Putting It All Together – Theme and Point of View Using “Ozymandias” Foundation Lesson



Read the poem below with your class, a partner, or a small group of your classmates. Think about the poem, using the activities below it to help you understand its meaning.

Ozymandias

I met a traveler 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,
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:
“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.

by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Point of View

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply

What Is the First Person Point of View?

When an author chooses to use first person point of view, he or she tells the story as though the narrator were speaking directly to the reader. The narrator uses the word “I” as a subject and tells the story using only what he or she, the narrator, would know personally about it. This point of view has both advantages and limitations – it is an intimate way of telling a story that involves readers personally and makes them more likely to “believe” in the story, but the narrator is limited to “knowing” only what goes on in the mind of one character – all other characters’ thoughts and feelings must be suggested by the events of the plot and the narrator’s observations of them.

In order to interpret the poem, the reader must make some educated guesses about the person who is telling the story and his or her situation. The *speaker*, or narrator, of the poem may differ from the *author* – the person writing the poem may wish to take on the *persona*, who is a made-up character, in the same way that a person writing a book of



fiction may tell the story from the first person point of view, yet not be at all like the narrator of the story. This poem is complicated in its point of view – it has a “frame story” that surrounds the real story. One narrator introduces a *second* narrator – the one who truly tells the story.

The *first* narrator – the one who says “I met a traveler from an antique land” – is almost a total mystery to the reader; we know very little about this narrator, not even if it is a man or a woman.

1. What can the reader guess about the second speaker, or narrator, of “Ozymandias”?
2. Where has this person been?
3. Where do you think he or she is now?
4. What has he or she seen?
5. On your own paper, draw a picture of the scene the narrator describes.

Strangely enough, toward the end of the poem, a *third* narrator appears. This is the long-dead Ozymandias himself, who speaks to the second narrator (and to the reader) through the words carved on the pedestal that once held his statue. Ozymandias, too, speaks in the first person.

6. How does the second narrator (the “traveler from an antique land”) describe the face of the statue of Ozymandias?

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze

7. What inferences does the narrator make about Ozymandias from the way the face of the statue looks?
8. Write down important words, images, and details that the narrator uses to describe Ozymandias.

When answering the following questions, remember that the reader can only infer the following information based on what is in the poem. We cannot know for sure; we can only make educated and informed guesses.



9. What kind of a person is Ozymandias?
10. When did he live?
11. Where did he live?
12. What did he achieve?
13. How did he view his achievements?
14. How does the reader view his achievements?
15. How and why are the two perceptions different?
16. What inferences does the narrator make about the person who carved the statue?
17. How do Ozymandias's own words give the reader a sense of his character?
18. What is the effect of the poet's using multiple narrators to tell the story?
19. What is the effect of the poet having each narrator speak in the first person?



Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate

20. How would the poem be different had the poet used a single narrator?
21. How would it be different had the poet used third-person point of view rather than first-person point of view? Try rewriting the poem this way to gauge the effect of a change in point of view.

Examine the Diction and Imagery

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply

22. With a partner, look carefully at the following words from the poem. Next to each, write down feelings and associations that are connected with the word in your own minds.
- a. antique land
 - b. vast
 - c. trunkless legs
 - d. shattered
 - e. visage
 - f. wrinkled lip
 - g. sneer
 - h. cold command
 - i. pedestal
 - j. colossal
 - k. wreck
 - l. decay
 - m. boundless and bare
 - n. lone and level

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze

23. What overall feelings are created by the use of these words and images? Write down several tone words that might describe the attitude of the author toward the subject. (The subject of the poem is Ozymandias, the ancient king.)
24. The last word of the line carved on the pedestal is “despair.” How does the poet help the reader to see the meaning of this word in more than one way?