Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

Ozymandias

Name:			

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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,

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."

Line 10 - Ozymandias - Pharaoh Rameses II (reigned 1279-1213 BCE). According to the *OED*, the statue was once 57 feet tall.

Discussion Questions

In your answers to these questions, quote effectively from the poem to illustrate your ideas. Incorporate at least 3 significant quotations from the poem in your answers to questions 1-3.

- 1. IRONY There are multiple kinds of irony within this poem. The central example is found in the juxtaposition of (a) the image described by the "traveler" in lines 2-9 with (b) the boast made by the poem's subject: "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; / Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!" (lines 10-11). What is ironic about Ozymandias' boast, given the specific scene in which the "traveller" encounters it? Moreover, how can readers interpret Ozymandias' words in a way that is probably the exact opposite of what Ozymandias himself intended to say?
- 2. DUAL SPEAKERS & STORIES Note that there are two speakers in this poem: (1) the "I" who begins the poem, and (2) the "traveller from an antique land" whose story the first speaker quotes. This technique is an example of a framing device—in which an author frames an "inner" story (the traveller's story) inside an "outer" story (the speaker's story). What effects does the poem's duality of the speakers have on your reading of the poem? How would the poem's impact be different if it had only one speaker who reported this anecdote directly to the reader—and what does Shelley seem to accomplish through this technique?
- 3. THE ARTIST What is the relationship between Ozymandias and the sculptor who immortalizes him? Which specific words does Shelley use to portray their relationship or bond? Based on the poem, what do you think Shelley thought about the relationship between artist and patron? Between artist and the artist's creation? If Shelley is commenting on the art of poetry, do you think he aligns himself <u>more</u> with Ozymandias or with the sculptor? Why?
- 4. CRITICISM Read the Essay by David Mikics on "Ozymandias" entitled "A poem to outlast empires" (click on the link on our MySchool page). Notice how, after Mikics provides the context in which Shelley wrote the poem, he describes the way the poem's images and complete thoughts <u>unfold</u>, section by section. What are two or three specific observations that Mikics makes about the poem's structure, tone, and language that illuminate the poem for you or that help you better understand and appreciate what Shelley does in the poem? <u>Quote at least 2 specific observations Mikics makes</u> in his essay, and for each one, <u>explain</u> why this observation is valuable or illuminating to you.