Before Reading

the lesson of the moth
Poem by Don Marquis

Identity
Poem by Julio Noboa

Does Beauty Matter?

What is our standard of beauty? A recent study found that people judged the beauty of strangers differently than they judged the beauty of people they knew. With strangers, people took into account only physical appearance. With familiar faces, the participants considered characteristics such as intelligence, courage, and dependability. The speakers in the poems you’re about to read have their own ideas about beauty.

SURVEY Survey your classmates to find out what five or six characteristics they think make someone beautiful. List the ten answers that were given most often, and then separate them into internal and external characteristics. According to your survey, is beauty only skin deep?

COMMON CORE

RL 1 Cite the textual evidence that supports inferences drawn from the text.
RL 4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning.
RL 5 Analyze how structure contributes to meaning.
POETIC FORM: FREE VERSE

It is often said that to write poetry, you first have to learn the rules—then you can break them. **Free verse** is poetry that “breaks the rules” because it does not contain regular patterns of rhythm or rhyme. However, writers of free verse often use repetition and other sound devices to emphasize meaning. As you read, notice the way the poems sound like everyday speech.

TEXT ANALYSIS: SPEAKER

In a poem, the voice that “talks” to the reader is called the **speaker**. Readers often assume that the speaker and the poet are the same, but this is not always true. The speaker may be a character created by the poet. For example, the speaker in “the lesson of the moth” is a cockroach named Archy. As you read each poem, use clues from the text to infer the speaker’s identity.

READING SKILL: CLARIFY MEANING

Poets use line breaks, stanzas, and punctuation to help emphasize ideas. For example, look at how the punctuation and line and stanza breaks in the first stanza of “Identity” affect meaning.

Let them be as flowers,
always watered, fed, guarded, admired,
but harnessed to a pot of dirt.

In the first two lines, commas cause you to pause and linger on words that are associated with positive feelings. However, the third line, which ends with a period, abruptly undercuts these comforting words. Because the stanza ends with this line, it emphasizes that the speaker sees confinement where others see beauty. As you study each poem, think about how the line breaks, stanzas, and punctuation affect the way you read and understand it. Use a graphic organizer like the one shown to note these elements and the effects they create.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Used?</th>
<th>Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>line and stanza breaks</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>separate positive and negative ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>end marks (question marks, periods, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
i was talking to a moth
the other evening
he was trying to break into
an electric light bulb
and fry himself on the wires

why do you fellows
pull this stunt i asked him
because it is the conventional
thing for moths or why

if that had been an uncovered
candle instead of an electric
light bulb you would
now be a small unsightly cinder
have you no sense

plenty of it he answered
but at times we get tired
of using it
we get bored with the routine

1. conventional: customary; usual; accepted.
2. cinder: a piece of burned material.
and crave beauty
and excitement
fire is beautiful
and we know that if we get
too close it will kill us
but what does that matter
it is better to be happy
for a moment
and be burned up with beauty
than to live a long time
and be bored all the while
so we wad all our life up
into one little roll
and then we shoot the roll
that is what life is for
it is better to be a part of beauty
for one instant and then to cease to
exist than to exist forever
and never be a part of beauty
our attitude toward life
is to come easy go easy
we are like human beings
used to be before they became
too civilized to enjoy themselves
and before i could argue him
out of his philosophy
he went and immolated himself
on a patent cigar lighter
i do not agree with him
myself i would rather have
half the happiness and twice
the longevity
but at the same time i wish
there was something i wanted
as badly as he wanted to fry himself
—archy

3. immolated (ɪmˈəʊlətɪd): killed as a sacrifice.
4. patent (ˈpætənt): patented; covered by a lawful grant that gives the inventor the exclusive right to manufacture an item for a certain time period.
5. longevity (ˈlɒŋjʊˈvɪtɪ): length of life.
Let them be as flowers, always watered, fed, guarded, admired, but harnessed to a pot of dirt.

I’d rather be a tall, ugly weed, clinging on cliffs, like an eagle wind-wavering above high, jagged rocks.

To have broken through the surface of stone to live, to feel exposed to the madness of the vast, eternal sky.

To be swayed by the breezes of an ancient sea, carrying my soul, my seed beyond the mountains of time or into the abyss of the bizarre.

I’d rather be unseen, and if, then shunned by everyone than to be a pleasant-smelling flower, growing in clusters in the fertile valley where they’re praised, handled, and plucked by greedy, human hands.

I’d rather smell of musty, green stench than of sweet, fragrant lilac.

If I could stand alone, strong and free, I’d rather be a tall, ugly weed.

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1. abyss: a seemingly bottomless space.
2. shunned: deliberately avoided; shut out.
After Reading

Comprehension

1. Recall According to “the lesson of the moth,” why do moths fly toward light?

2. Represent Create a sketch that shows the differences between the flower and the weed described in “Identity.” Make sure your sketch reflects at least two specific details from the poem.

Text Analysis

3. Make Inferences What does the speaker learn about himself in “the lesson of the moth”? Support your response with evidence from the poem.

4. Examine Stanza In “the lesson of the moth,” how does the poet use stanzas to help you follow the conversation between the cockroach and the moth?

5. Analyze Metaphor What kind of person does the speaker in “Identity” want to be? What kind of person does he not want to be?

6. Clarify Meaning Refer to the charts you created as you read. For each poem, tell whether the line breaks, the stanzas, or the punctuation did the most to help you understand the poem’s meaning. Explain what and how that element helped you understand.

7. Compare and Contrast Views In “the lesson of the moth,” what is the moth’s attitude about the price of beauty? In “Identity,” what is the speaker’s attitude about the price of beauty? Explain whether you think their views are more similar or more different.

8. Evaluate Free Verse Use a chart like the one shown to list examples of rhyme, repetition, or other sound devices, such as alliteration (the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words). What images or ideas do these devices emphasize?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“the lesson of the moth”</th>
<th>“Identity”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rhyme</td>
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<td>Repetition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sound Devices</td>
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Extension and Challenge

9. SCIENCE CONNECTION How do the qualities of real cockroaches and moths correspond to the poetic creations Don Marquis presents in “the lesson of the moth”? Research to find out about each creature’s habits and life span. Display your findings in a poster, and be ready to explain how the poem does—or does not—relate to reality.

Does BEAUTY matter?

How has reading these poems influenced your thoughts about beauty?
Language

◆ GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT: Use Commas Correctly

By using commas properly to indicate a pause, you can avoid confusing your readers. When writing a sentence that lists items in a series, insert a comma after every item except the last one. (A series consists of three or more items.) Also insert a comma between two or more adjectives of equal rank that modify the same noun.

Original: Both the moth in “the lesson of the moth” and the speaker in “Identity” find beauty in unusual surprising places.

Revised: Both the moth in “the lesson of the moth” and the speaker in “Identity” find beauty in unusual, surprising places.

PRACTICE Insert commas where needed in the following sentences.

1. The moth would rather take risks get injured and die young than be bored.
2. He thinks that the dangerous exciting heat of fire is beautiful.
3. I wouldn’t mind being unseen shunned and alone like a weed.
4. Unlike flowers, weeds are strong free and independent.

For more help with using commas correctly, see page R49 in the Grammar Handbook.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION

Continue to explore the meaning of “the lesson of the moth” and “Identity” by responding to this prompt. Then use the revising tip to improve your writing.

WRITING PROMPT

Short Constructed Response: Paragraph
Choose one of the “characters” from the poems—Archi, the moth, or the speaker in “Identity.” Write a paragraph answering the question, “Does beauty matter?” from the point of view of this character.

REVISING TIP

Review your response. Have you used commas correctly in a series or between adjectives of equal rank that modify the same noun? If not, revise.

Interactive Revision
Go to thinkcentral.com.
KEYWORD: HML8-623