A Wager Between Friends: Ozymandias sonnets by Bysse Shelley and Smith

"Ozymandias," by Percey Bysse Shelley, 1800s England.

1.   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,
5.   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.
9.   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
13.   Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
        The lone and level sands stretch far away."

* mocked = "made a copy"

1. The first word of this poem is "I." Let's say that's person #1. How many people are in this poem? In what lines do they first appear?

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2. In line 1, what does the word "antique" mean?

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3. What are the "vast and trunkless legs of stone" in line 2? What is the "shattered visage" in line 4? Are these things related?

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4. Who in this poem has a "frown," a "wrinkled lip," and a "sneer of cold command?"

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5. Who is Ozymandias?

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6. In Line 11, what does "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" mean?

A. "Hey, powerful people, check out my awesome stuff and think about how you suck."
B. "I want everyone, from famous people to sad people, to check out the work I've done!"
C. "I was once strong and awesome, but now I am seriously bummed out."
D. "Ozymandias was a mighty king, but I am the sculptor of his statue, and I am even cooler than Ozy."
E. "I was once powerful and cool, but I always knew the desert would beat me in the end."
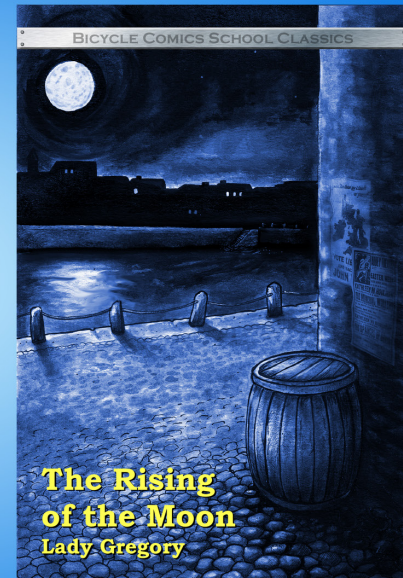
7. Which of these words describe Ozymandias?
I. Imperious   II. Impregnable   III. Myopic   IV. Magnanimous   V. Dead

A. I and V only
B. I, II, and V only
C. III and V only
D. I, III, and V only
E. II and IV only

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A Wager Between Friends: Ozymandias sonnets by Bysse Shelley and Smith

Bysse-Shelley wrote his sonnet as part of a contest with a friend of his, the poet Horace Smith. Below is Smith's poem, also titled "Ozymandias":

1.   In Egypt's sandy silence, all alone,
         Stands a gigantic Leg, which far off throws
         The only shadow that the Desert knows:—
         "I am great OZYMANDIAS," saith the stone,
5.   "The King of Kings; this mighty City shows
         "The wonders of my hand."— The City's gone,—
         Nought but the Leg remaining to disclose
         The site of this forgotten Babylon.
         We wonder,—and some Hunter may express
9.   Wonder like ours, when thro' the wilderness
         Where London stood, holding the Wolf in chace*,
         He meets some fragment huge, and stops to guess
13.   What powerful but unrecorded race
         Once dwelt in that annihilated place.

– Horace Smith.[14]

*chace = a hunting area/game preserve in Great Britain.

8. Line 5 introduces a "City." Do you know what city this is? How many cities are mentioned in ths poem?

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9. What casts "the only shadow that the desert knows?" What does this information tell us about the desert?

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10. There are three time periods in this poem: Long ago, now, and much later.

- Which character(s) live in "long ago?" _____

- Which character(s) live in "now"? _____

- Which character(s) live in "much later?" _____

- How do these characters interact if they are alive at different times?

11. Which of these two sonnets do you prefer? List two reasons for your opinion:

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