

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Tyger

By William Blake
1794

William Blake (1757-1827) was an English poet during the Romantic era who wrote extensively about God, nature, and the beauty of the human imagination. "The Tiger," published alongside another poem called "The Lamb" in Blake's poetry collection Songs of Experience, is one of the most anthologized poems in English. As you read, take notes on how the poem discusses the human condition and the question of existence.

[1] Tyger Tyger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

[5] In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art
[10] Could twist the sinews¹ of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
[15] What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
[20] Did he who made the Lamb² make thee?

Tyger tyger burning bright
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?



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1. **Sinew (noun):** a tendon or ligament uniting muscle to bone or bone to bone
2. In Christianity, the lamb is often a symbol for Jesus Christ.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which of the following statements best summarizes how Blake describes the tiger? [RL.2]
- A. Blake depicts a fearsome, dangerous animal.
 - B. Blake describes the tiger in terms of light and dark, making the tiger a beacon in the forest.
 - C. Blake depicts the tiger as an awe-inspiring creature, made artfully (i.e. symmetry) and of powerful elements (i.e. fire and stars).
 - D. Blake describes the tiger as being at one with all of nature and human life, unchallenged even by its own origins.

2. What kind of imagery or language does Blake use to describe the tiger being “made”? [RL.3]
What mood does this language elicit?

3. Which of the following statements best describes the effect the imagery in stanza 4 has on the theme of the text? [RL.3] [RL.2]
- A. It contributes to the theme of creation, implying that the tiger, and thus all life, must have a deliberate and purposeful creator or craftsman/blacksmith.
 - B. It intensifies the theme of creation, producing an effect of awe.
 - C. It implies that creation must have tools beyond what the creator/blacksmith wills.
 - D. It alludes to Hephaestus (known as Vulcan in the Roman mythology), the Greek god of fire and metalworking, establishing a higher power in the theme of creation.

4. Explain the line: "Did He who make the lamb make thee?" What does this [RL.4] [RL.2] juxtaposition, or comparison, of the lamb and the tiger contribute to a central idea of the poem?

5. Compare and contrast the first stanza and the last stanza, which are almost exactly [RL.5] alike. Which of the following statements best summarizes the effect of this repetition on the text?

- A. It emphasizes the narrator's questions concerning existence and the general theme of life's purpose.
- B. It suggests that the narrator's questions are cyclical in nature—that they only produce more questions, not answers.
- C. By changing the word "could" to "dare," it raises the status of the creature, as well as even further exalting its supposed creator.
- D. All of the above.

6. Which of the following statements best describes the author's purpose in this poem? [RL.6]

- A. In this poem Blake explores the question of existence and how such design came to be.
- B. Having lived in the same era as Charles Darwin, Blake is talking about biology and evolution, but posing the questions in a cosmic/spiritual way.
- C. In this poem Blake reveals a gap in human knowledge: where did life come from?
- D. As a Romantic, Blake believes in the power of nature, specifically of God in nature; thus with this poem, Blake exposes what he believes is the work of a higher being in existence.

