



Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flow'r that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heav'n, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry;
For having lost but once your prime,
You may forever tarry*.

- Robert Herrick,
published 1648

*tarry = linger, loiter

Questions On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions with thoughtful, complete sentences.

1. This poem's theme is pretty straightforward. Write just one sentence in your own words that summarizes the poem's main message.

2. Now, let's look at the poem's structure. What is the poem's rhyme scheme? What is the meter/syllable pattern?

3. Write two passages from the poem where Herrick employs personification.

4. Symbolically, how are people connected to elements in the natural world? Specifically address the poem's use of flowers and the sun.

5. Clearly, the speaker thinks that youth is better than old

age. What is his reasoning? What age do you think of as the prime of life? Explain your answer.

6. In order for these young people to make their lives glorious and fulfilled, there is one specific action they must take. What, according to the speaker, is that action? (Hint: You'll find the answer in line 14.)

YOLO
YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE

7. What, do you suppose, Herrick would say if you told him you interpreted his poem to mean that you should live a wild and crazy life, not worrying about the consequences of your actions?

8. Is this poem depressing or just realistic? Explain your answer.

Carpe Diem

“To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time” worksheet questions

1. This poem’s theme is pretty straightforward. Write just one sentence in your own words that summarizes the poem’s main message. Basically, this poem is saying that young people need to make the best use of their time because growing old is awful.
2. Now, let’s look at the poem’s structure. What is the poem’s rhyme scheme? What is the meter/syllable pattern? The rhyme scheme is ABAB/CDCD/EFEF/GHGH. The meter is alternating iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter with catalexis, which is a fancy way of saying the odd-numbered lines (1, 3, 5, etc.) are each eight syllables long and the even-numbered lines (2, 4, 6, etc.) are each seven syllables long. If students get confused about the beat counts, let them know that certain words, like “flow’r” and “heav’n,” are intended to be read as one syllable, while a word such as “glorious” has three syllables in today’s pronunciation, but is squeezed into two by the poet.
3. Write two passages from the poem where Herrick employs personification. There are several items that students might choose, including line 3, where he describes a “flow’r that smiles,” and in the second stanza, where Herrick refers to the sun with the pronoun “he” and describes the sun as running a race.
4. Symbolically, how are people connected to elements in the natural world? Specifically address the poem’s use of flowers and the sun. Herrick connects our life paths to the growth cycle of a rose and the sun’s daily travels through the sky. As flowers, he shows us that we sprout, unfurl our beauty for the world to enjoy, then wither, and eventually fall to the ground. The sun is a glorious, warming sunrise and it continues to shine brilliantly until noon and then, gradually, loses power and warmth, just as we do as we age.
5. Clearly, the speaker thinks that youth is better than old age. What is his reasoning? What age do you think of as the prime of life? Explain your answer. The speaker believes that we are warm, beautiful, and passionate when we are young, but then everything that follows our peak is “the worse, and worst time.” Students’ answers to the second part of this question will vary and always make for an interesting class discussion.
6. In order for these young people to make their lives glorious and fulfilled, there is one specific action they must take. What, according to the speaker, is that action? (Hint: You’ll find the answer in line 14.) The speaker wants them to go get married. Notice that he uses the phrase “go marry,” not “go merrily.” This is a command to find a spouse. When you discuss this question with your students, be sure to ask them if they believe this is still the most important ingredient for a fulfilling life. The poem was written in the 1600s. Does this sentiment still apply today?
7. What, do you suppose, Herrick would say if you told him you interpreted his poem to mean that you should live a wild and crazy life, not worrying about the consequences of your actions? Herrick would likely advise the student that there’s a fine line between living your life to the fullest and making spur-of-the-moment, completely irrational decisions. His idea of “living it up” was to get married before you get too old to have kids. Today, the idea of “YOLO” is mistakenly used as an excuse for bad behavior and poor judgment. Students will likely have passionate opinions about YOLO, a teen slang/hashtag they love to hate. If you’re not familiar with YOLO, you should Google the term before you lead this discussion just so you know what the kids today are sayin’.
8. Is this poem depressing or just realistic? Explain your answer. Opinions will vary and I give credit for any reasonable answer.