

Name:
Date:

Period:
Ms. Lopez

Letters to a Young Poet and “Initiation” Lesson 1 – Language and Art

Directions: Examine the sections of “Letter One” noted below and provide text-based responses to the questions that follow each section. You may need to refer back to the full text to read the whole section being referenced.

1. Identify important words and phrases in the title. How do they tell you what the text is about?

“Your letter arrived just a few days ago. I want to thank you for the great confidence you have placed in me” (lines 1-2).

2. For what is Rilke thanking the young poet? What might Rilke’s use of the word *confidence* reveal about the contents of the young poet’s initial letter?

“That is all I can do. I cannot discuss your verses; for any attempt at criticism would be foreign to me” (lines 2-3).

3. What might Rilke’s use of the word *foreign* reveal about the relationship he perceives between art and criticism?

4. What can you infer about the purpose of the young poet’s letter from Rilke’s refusal?

“Nothing touches a work of art so little as words of criticism: they always result in more or less fortunate misunderstandings” (lines 3-5)

5. Paraphrase Rilke’s statement, including Rilke’s assertion of what results from criticism.

“Things aren't all so tangible and sayable . . . those mysterious existences, whose life endures beside our own small, transitory life” (lines 5-9).

6. What does Rilke believe is “unsayable?”

7. What “life” does Rilke attribute to works of art? How does the life of art compare to human life? HINT: The word *transitory* means “something that doesn’t last very long.”

“With this note as a preface, . . . reading your verses, though I am not able to name them specifically” (lines 10-18).

8. How do Rilke’s responses to the young poet’s work in the second paragraph develop the idea that Rilke introduces in the first paragraph?

9. What does Rilke praise about the young poet’s writing? How does this praise of the young poet’s verses introduce and develop a new idea?

HOMEWORK PREPARATION & REVIEW FOR EACH LESSON:

Try to answer the questions associated with each lesson on your own and make appropriate annotations to the text. Be prepared to discuss your responses and annotations in the next lesson. Annotation codes may include the following:

>Boxing & defining unfamiliar words on the text<
>Analyzing word choice & figurative language<

>Starring important ideas<
>Writing thoughts, reactions, or connections<

Review questions answered in class to deepen your understanding of the text and determine points that you still find confusing,