

Name:
Date:

Period:
Ms. Lopez

***Letters to a Young Poet* and “Initiation”**

Lesson 2 – The Artistic Life

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

“You ask whether your verses are any good . . . No one can advise or help you—no one” (lines 19-24).

1. What do you notice about the structure of these sentences? (Look at how they contrast with his previous sentences.) What effect does Rilke create through these structural choices?

2. What does Rilke “beg” the young poet to give up?

“There is only one thing you should do . . . become a sign and witness to this impulse” (lines 24-32).

3. How might your understanding of the tone of Rilke’s message change if the word “only” (24) was removed? How does this help you understand the earlier use of the word “beg” (22) and the word “most” (23) as well as the later use of italics on the word “*must*” (28)?

4. What advice does Rilke give the young poet? What questions is Rilke imploring the young poet to ask of himself? According to Rilke, what answer must an artist give?

5. How does Rilke refine his ideas through the image of the roots? Where else does he extend this metaphor?

More lines on back

6. How might your understanding of Rilke’s message change if “your” was replaced with the word *the* in the sentence “the most silent hour of your night”?

7. How can the understanding of “your night” help you to make meaning of Rilke’s reference to the “humblest and most indifferent hour”?

“Then come close to Nature. . . . the images from your dreams, and the objects that you remember” (lines 32-41).

8. What kinds of poems does Rilke believe the young poet should avoid? Why?

9. How does Rilke’s advice about the subject matter of poetry introduce and develop an important idea on the text?

10. What words does Rilke capitalize although they are not traditional proper nouns? Why does he do this?
