

Name: _____

Date: _____

6B- _____

Reading: "The Trouble with Poetry" by Billy Collins

Directions: Read the poem twice. Then answer the questions on the back of this sheet.

The Trouble with Poetry: A Poem of Explanation

by Billy Collins

The trouble with poetry, I realized
as I walked along a beach one night —
cold Florida sand under my bare feet,
a show of stars in the sky —

the trouble with poetry is
that it encourages the writing of more poetry,
more guppies crowding the fish tank,
more baby rabbits
hopping out of their mothers into the dewy grass.

And how will it ever end?
unless the day finally arrives
when we have compared everything in the world
to everything else in the world,

and there is nothing left to do
but quietly close our notebooks
and sit with our hands folded on our desks.

Poetry fills me with joy
and I rise like a feather in the wind.
Poetry fills me with sorrow
and I sink like a chain flung from a bridge.

But mostly poetry fills me
with the urge to write poetry,
to sit in the dark and wait for a little flame
to appear at the tip of my pencil.

And along with that, the longing to steal,
to break into the poems of others
with a flashlight and a ski mask.

And what an unmerry band of thieves we are,
cut-purses, common shoplifters,
I thought to myself
as a cold wave swirled around my feet
and the lighthouse moved its megaphone over the sea,
which is an image I stole directly
from Lawrence Ferlinghetti —
to be perfectly honest for a moment —

the bicycling poet of San Francisco
whose little amusement park of a book
I carried in a side pocket of my uniform
up and down the treacherous halls of high school.

(***Lawrence Ferlinghetti:** A Beat poet known for challenging the rules of poetry in the 1950s.

Treacherous: untrustworthy, "two-faced," dangerous)

(over)

Questions: USE PENCIL. Answer the following questions on the space provided.

1. Underline the **simile(s)** in Stanza (paragraph) 5.
2. In Stanza 6, the speaker (narrator) of the poem refers to a “**little flame**” on the tip of his pencil. Here, the poet implies, or suggests without quite saying anything explicitly, a **metaphor**. What might the “flame” at the tip of his pencil represent here? Why?

3. In Stanza 7, the speaker refers to “**breaking into**” a poem, “**with a flashlight and a ski mask**.” He says this figuratively, or metaphorically. What does the speaker really mean by this expression? In other words, how are poets “thieves”? Explain your answer.

4. At the end of the poem, the speaker’s “**tone**,” or **attitude** toward the subject of his poem, seems to change. (**Examples of tones:** serious, sarcastic / ironic, playful, light-hearted, preachy, sincere, celebratory, respectful, earnest, solemn, intimate, personal, revealing, confessional, desperate, rebellious, etc.) Basically, how does the whole feel of the poem shift with the poet’s use of the single word *treacherous*? Explain the shift in tone with text details.

In your answer, make sure you include the following:

- the poet’s tone, or attitude, from the **beginning** of the poem (Stanzas 1-8)
- the poet’s tone, or attitude, from the **end** of the poem (Stanza 9)
- details from the poem to support your answer

The poet’s tone is (adjective: see above) _____ in **Stanzas 1-8**.

His tone shifts to (adjective: see above) _____ in **Stanza 9**.

Explain your answer with text details: _____
