



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH (2026-27)
CLASS – X
OZYMANDIAS

Percy Bysshe Shelley's sonnet "**Ozymandias**" explores the temporary nature of political power, human arrogance, and the artistic triumph of permanence through a traveller's tale about a shattered, forgotten statue of an ancient Egyptian king in the desert.

Plot and Structure

- **Framing Narrative:** The speaker hears a story from a traveller coming from an "antique land" rather than witnessing the ruins firsthand.
- **The Physical Statue:** The traveller describes two massive, trunkless stone legs standing upright and a half-sunken, shattered head (visage) lying nearby on the sand.
- **Form:** It is a 14-line sonnet that blends elements of both Petrarchan and Shakespearean rhyme schemes, mirroring the fractured state of the monument itself.

Key Imagery and Symbolism

- **The Facial Expression:** The sculptor carved a frown, a wrinkled lip, and a "sneer of cold command," accurately capturing the ruler's inner cruelty and arrogance.
- **The Pedestal Inscription:** The base reads: "*My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; / Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!*"
- **The Desert Setting:** The grand works have vanished, replaced entirely by "boundless and bare" and "lone and level sands" that stretch out into the empty distance.

Core Themes

- **The Transience of Power:** Absolute political authority and empires crumble into total obscurity over time. Nature and time outlast human hubris.
- **The Power of Art:** The sculptor's ability to mock and preserve the king's passions (the sneer) survives longer than the king's actual political empire or physical might.
- **Profound Irony:** The gap between Ozymandias's boastful command for others to "despair" at his greatness and the absolute nothingness surrounding his broken wreck mocks his delusions of eternity.

Stanza Wise Explanation

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown*

The narrator meets a traveller from the ancient land which refers to Egypt here. The traveller is talking to the narrator and telling him that there is a huge stone-statue which is now crumbling down. He further elaborates those two huge and massive legs, which were the remaining parts of the once grand statue, are still standing there. The upper part or trunk of

the statue is missing as it seems to have crumbled and lost over a period of time. The place is a sandy desert and half covered and the face of the statue lies half sunken in the sand.

***And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:***

The traveller then goes on to describe the expression that still reflected on the face of the statue. Despite the fact that the kingdom had fallen with time and the King's glory had faded away, the stone face had expressions of arrogance. It had frown, wrinkled up lips, scornful and hostile expression on face which showed an air of pride and arrogance. All this showed his insensitivity disapproval belittling others.

The sculptor of this statue seemed to know the king's arrogant nature. The sculptor skilfully interpreted the king's feelings and emotions on the statue. The king had no respect even for the sculptor whose hands created his statue.

***And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."***

It was the statue of a ruler of Egypt – the great king Ramesses. He was the great Pharaoh of the 19th dynasty of ancient Egypt. His name was Ozymandias. The remains of the statue stood mounted on a stone-based pedestal. There was an inscription engraved on it which read as "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings: Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair!" This shows the king was full of conceit, self-importance, vanity which thinks of all others as very low in front of him. These words of his challenge the mighty ones and says if anyone tries to surpass his work or tries to match up to him, the person will only end up in despair and frustration.

The narrator then shows that despite his boastful inscription everything is conquered by nature and nothing is immortal. The once vast and great kingdom had now disappeared. Nothing is left of the vast kingdom and all that can be seen is sand as far as one can see. The great kingdom and its great king had fallen. The civilisation of his time had turned into a deserted barren wasteland. The poet has commented and shown sarcasm that of statement by showing the insignificance of human beings the passage of time. Nothing is important and everything has to decay with time.

Rhyme Scheme:

Octave – ABABACDC

Sestet – edefef

POETIC DEVICES

Enjambment: Shelley uses this device throughout the text. For example, it occurs in lines 2-8. By enjambling the lines, the poet creates a surprising flow.

Alliteration: It occurs in “an antique,” “stone/ Stand,” “sunk a shattered,” “cold command,” “lone and level” etc.

Metaphor: The title itself is a metaphor. It refers to a fragment of Ozymandias’s statue. Furthermore, a metaphor, “colossal Wreck” is used as a reference to Ozymandias.

The “sneer of cold command” contains a metaphor. Here, the ruler’s contempt for his subjugates is compared to the ruthlessness of a military commander.

The poem is an extended metaphor also.

Irony: the opposite what is expected to happen

Shelley uses this device in the following lines, “Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!/ Nothing beside remains.” The following lines also contain this device.

The emperor was arrogant for the power and command he had. He boasted of his wealth and glory calling him as ‘King of Kings’ but ironically, none of it is left now. Everything has perished with time. Nothing is immortal.

Synecdoche: (substitution of part to stand for the whole, or the whole to stand for a part)

In the poem, the “hand” and “heart” collectively hint at the pharaoh, Ozymandias, as a whole. It is a use of synecdoche.

Poetry

Allusion: The line “My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings” is an allusion to the actual inscription described in the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus’s *Bibliotheca historica*.

Theme & Message of the Poem ‘Ozymandias’

The poem also utilizes the themes of vainglory, the power of art, the decline of power, etc. Time is all powerful and witness to reveal that the kingdoms do not last; glory dims and fades ultimately but the art survives the ravages of time. Force, power and authority die but the creativity in the form of art lives the time.

The main theme is introduced in the very beginning where Shelley’s speaker describes the “colossal Wreck” of Ozymandias half sunk in the lone desert. The poem stresses on the transience of regal glory and power. The themes of the futility of life, the fate of history, ravages of time are also associated with it.

Ozymandias tried to become greater than God. He declared himself the “King of Kings” but irony is that now his remains are broken and half sunk in sand. The might and majesty of king do not last longer and the thing that lasts is the art which keeps the memories alive of its subject. The statue, symbolising the power and glory of the pharaoh, is crumbling. Yet the arrogant sneer on the “shattered visages” remains intact as a proof of the ability of the sculpture to understand and express the passions of his ruler.

In short, we can say that the most important theme is the impermanence of a ruler’s glory and his legacy.

Extract 1

*"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains.*

(a) Who is Ozymandias addressing as "ye Mighty"?

- He addresses other powerful rulers, kings, or rival monarchs of the world.

(b) What trait of the king's character is revealed here?

- It shows his extreme pride, arrogance, and boastfulness, as he believes his power will last forever.

(c) Explain the irony in the phrase "Nothing beside remains."

- Ozymandias meant that no one could match his grand achievements. The irony is that his entire empire has vanished, leaving only a broken, forgotten ruin in an empty desert.

Extract 2

*"...its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed."*

(a) What do the "lifeless things" refer to?

- They refer to the broken, shattered pieces of the stone statue lying in the sand.

(b) Whose "hand" and "heart" are mentioned?

- The "hand" belongs to the clever sculptor who mocked (imitated) the king's facial expressions. The "heart" belongs to Ozymandias, which fed on the passions and cruel pride of his people.

(c) What literary device or theme is highlighted here?

- It highlights **irony** and the triumph of **art over time**—the sculptor's carved emotions survived, while the mighty king did not.

Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow:

*Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

(i) Why does he say ‘nothing beside remains’?

Ans- Once upon a time, there was a vast kingdom. But no trace of it was left now. Hence, the poet says that ‘nothing beside remains’.

(ii) Find a word in the given extract which means the same as “extremely large or great.”

Ans- Colossal

(iii) Explain the last line.

Ans- Every remnant of the powerful kingdom of the most powerful of all rulers has been destroyed by the ravages of time. There was nothing now but a vast desert landmass.

(iv) What is the poetic device used in the second line?

Ans- Alliteration.

And on the pedestal these words appear;

“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:

Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”

(i) What was carved?

Ans- A small introduction of the king and a message for all was carved on it.

(ii) Find a word in the given extract which means the same as “the base or support on which a statue, obelisk, or column is mounted. “

Ans- Pedestal

(iii) Explain: Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair?

Ans- According to Ozymandias, his contemporaries should consider his accomplishments and authority and feel inferior to him. This shows that he wants to look down upon all the other rulers and considers himself supreme.

(iv) What do the words written on the pedestal reflect about Ozymandias?

Ans- It portrays Ozymandias as a haughty and conceited ruler. He wants to demonstrate his eminence and immortalise his significant accomplishments.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS BY SELECTING THE CORRECT OPTIONS.

(a) The poem is set in _____ .

- (i) the wilderness
- (ii) an ancient land
- (iii) a palace
- (iv) a desert

Ans- (iv) a desert

(b) Select the option that includes the set of qualities that the poet attributes to Ozymandias, in the given extract.

- (I) boastful, furious, manipulative
- (ii) ruthless, arrogant, desperate
- (iii) haughty, self-serving, contemptuous
- (iv) ambitious, aggressive, cruel

Ans- (iii) haughty, self-serving, contemptuous

(c) In the line, “My name is Ozymandias, king of kings”, the poet makes an indirect reference to an ancient empire to remind readers that_____.

- (i) Time can be conquered

- (ii) humility is a great virtue
 - (iii) the glory of the king is everlasting
 - (iv) a monarch's power is ephemeral
- Ans-** (iv) a monarch's power is ephemeral

(d) The words 'bare' and 'decay' indicate that the mighty ruler has become_____.

- (i) obscure
- (ii) defenceless
- (iii) dejected
- (iv) indestructible

Ans- (i) obscure

(e) The tone of the poem is _____.

- (i) mocking
- (ii) nostalgic
- (iii) gloomy
- (iv) gloating

Ans- (i) mocking

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS BRIEFLY.

(a) "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" Who is Ozymandias referring to when he speaks of 'ye Mighty'? Why should they despair?

Ans- All subsequent kings and queens who will reign after the King Ozymandias are referred to here. He says they can't match his splendour and might, therefore they should be sad and give up.

(b) Bring out the irony in the poem.

Ans- The irony of "Ozymandias" cuts much deeper as the reader realises that the forces of mortality and flexibility, described brilliantly in the concluding lines, will wear down and destroy all our lives. There is a special justice in the way tyrants are subject to time, but all humans face death and decay. The pedestal's claim that onlookers should despair at Ozymandias's works thus takes on a new and ironic meaning: one despairs not at Ozymandias's power, but at how powerless time and decay makes everyone, even the statue has been destroyed by time.

(c) The poem re-emphasizes the idea that political power is transient but art is eternal and it survives. Do you agree? Why/ Why not?

Ans- Yes, I agree that political power is transient but art is eternal. The fact that even this "king of kings" lies decaying in a distant desert suggests that no amount of power can withstand the merciless and unceasing passage of time. Yet even as the poem insists that "nothing beside" the shattered statue and its pedestal remains, there is one thing that actually has withstood the centuries: art. The skillful making of the statue itself and the words carved alongside it have survived long after Ozymandias and his kingdom turned to dust, and through this Shelley's poem positions art as possibly the most persistent tool in preserving humanity's legacy.

(d) Overarching ambition can lead to great leaders and their downfall. Substantiate your position in favour or in opposition to this statement.

Ans- I agree that Overarching ambition can lead to downfall of a great leader too. When one is too ambitious, ambition gets the better of a person. For example, in the poem Ozymandias, the king/ruler probably became too concerned with his power and immortality and he became delusional that he too will perish.

(e) ‘Nothing beside remains.’ What does the narrator mean when he says these words?

Ans- The narrator highlights the reality that human life is time-bound when he uses these words. Along with the ruler’s descent came a decline in both the ruler’s authority and popularity. In this universe, nothing is both immortal and permanent.

(f) What message is conveyed through this poem?

Ans- This poem makes a very profound reference to the central truth of human existence—that nothing matters. Everything in our universe is finite and not everlasting. The enduring character of time and existence has been made clear via this poem.

(g) How effective is the use of the phrase "Nothing beside remains", in conveying the theme of the transience and impermanence of power and human achievement, in Ozymandias by P.B.Shelley?

It is highly effective as it emphasizes the idea that even the greatest accomplishments of human beings will eventually crumble and disappear, leaving behind only the inevitable march of time. By emphasizing this theme, Ozymandias serves as a powerful reminder of the fleeting nature of human existence and the futility of pursuing power and glory at the expense of more meaningful pursuits.

(h) In the poem Ozymandias how does the poet show that art and language outlive the other symbols of power?

In the poem ‘Ozymandias’ the words ‘which yet survive’ imply the immortality of a work of art that the artist created. The sculptor’s hands copied and portrayed his subject’s passions and his heart felt those and inspired to make it possible. Even though the sculptor’s subject is now dead and his glories, kingdom and statues have crumbled to dust and have not lasted, his creation is still alive (stamped) on the otherwise lifeless stones. Through this the poet has shown that art and language outlive the other symbols of power.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

**Q1. “.....boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”**

Explain the above line with reference to the ravages of time in ‘Ozymandias.’

Ans. Human greatness and glory are transient. Kings erect sculptures and monuments to preserve their reputation and name in history. However, Glory fades with the passing of time. The statue of Ozymandias is in ruins. Although the words carved on it show how powerful he is, power, hubris, and human pride are all transient.

His influence and accomplishments are for nothing. Time ravages and spares no one. Ozymandias regarded himself as a deity and desired to be remembered forever through this piece of art (statue). Dust was all that was left of him for future generations to witness. His broken statue and disfigured visage depict the tragic consequences of human pride.

Ravages of time spare no one. Neither the powerful King who commissioned the statue to be built, nor the sculptor who built the statue with great passion, nor the statue itself. All three are toppled by mere grains of sand.

Q2. Bring out the theme of Shelley's poem, 'Ozymandias.'

OR

"The poem, 'Ozymandias' illustrates the vanity of human greatness." Comment.

One of Shelley's most famous works, "Ozymandias" describes the ruins of an ancient king's statue in a foreign desert. The themes in the poem are-

1. The Transience of Power

The poem goes on to explain that time not only destroyed this statue, it also essentially erased the entire kingdom the statue was built to overlook. All that remains of the statue are two "vast" stone legs standing upright and a head half-buried in sand, along with a boastful inscription describing the ruler as the "king of kings" whose mighty achievements invoke awe and despair in all who behold them. The poem implicitly critiques such power through its suggestion that both great rulers and their kingdoms will fall to the sands of time.

2. The Power of Art

"Ozymandias" famously describes a ruined statue of an ancient king in an empty desert. Although the king's statue boastfully commands onlookers to "Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair," there are no works left to examine: the king's cities, empire, and power have all disappeared over time.

Although the statue is a "wreck" in a state of "decay," its individual pieces show the skill of the sculptor and preserve the story of Ozymandias. The fragments interpret and preserve the king's personality and show onlookers throughout history what sort of a man and leader Ozymandias truly was. These fragments, then, are examples of art's unique ability to capture and relate an individual's character even after their death. In fact, the poem explicitly emphasizes art's ability to bring personalities to life.

3. Man Versus Nature

The statue is notably found in a desert, a landscape hostile towards life. That the statue is "trunkless" suggests sandstorms eroded the torso or buried it entirely, while the face being "shattered" implies humanity's relative weakness: even the destruction of a hulking piece of stone is nothing for nature.

Ozymandias may be the king of kings, but even kings can be toppled by mere grains of sand.

Q3. Time brings the greatest of the great to their knees. How is this true of King Ozymandias?

Ans. P.B. Shelley wrote the sonnet titled Ozymandias. It communicates the message that human greatness and glory are transient. The monuments and statues erected by the rulers to preserve their name and reputation are destroyed over time. The poem therefore illustrates the vainness and transience of human grandeur and greatness. A renowned Egyptian king, Ozymandias created the monument in order to preserve his renown and name. His power and majesty faded with the passing of time.

A traveller from Egypt discovers the king Ozymandias statue that is shattered. He discovers the statue's two enormous, trunkless legs on a platform in a desert. The broken statue's face is nearby, partially buried. He observes the statue's haughty attitude and sense of superiority. The king's emotions were captured on the statue's face by the artist's hand. The following

words were written on the pedestal: My name is Ozymandias, king of kings' The lines show that even though Ozymandias was a king of kings, he was unaware that human hubris and pride do not endure for very long and that time eventually drags even the best of the great to their knees. Death is a sure leveller.

Q4. What is your impression of Ozymandias as a king?

Ans. In his day, Ozymandias was a powerful monarch. He was regarded as strongest of the strong kings. He had fought numerous battles, brought in many riches, and grown his kingdom into an enormous one. His contemporaries were humbled by his accomplishments when they witnessed the palaces he constructed and the example he established for them. The broken head's expression suggests that the man was a harsh ruler who was exceedingly haughty and looked down on his subjects with disdain. But time did not spare him. His immense realm was covered in dust when he died, leaving no trace behind. Ozymandias had believed that while he himself would die, he would leave a lasting and intimidating legacy through everything he built. Yet his words are ultimately empty, as everything he built has crumbled. The people and places he ruled over are gone, leaving only an abandoned desert whose "lone and level sands" imply that there's not even a trace of the kingdom's former glory to be found. The pedestal's claim that onlookers should despair at Ozymandias's works thus takes on a new and ironic meaning: one despairs not at Ozymandias's power, but at how powerless time and decay make everyone.

Q5 Critically appreciate the poem "Ozymandias".

Ans. "Ozymandias" was written by P.B. Shelly. The poem is a sonnet based on Greek history.

The speaker says that he met a traveller who returned from an ancient country. The traveller saw a broken statue in the desert. The statue's two legs stood on the pedestal. The body was not upon the two legs. Near them was lying the shattered face of the statue. There were frowns, sneer and expression of cruel authority on the face. It seemed that the person who made the statue could understand the king's character well and took every care to reflect it on stone. Though the sculptor and the king died long back, the broken statue still reflects the pride and cruelty of the king.

"Ozymandias" is a masterful sonnet. It focuses mostly on one metaphor: the broken, demolished monument in the barren desert, with its haughty, passionate expression and lunatic inscription ("Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"). Ironically, the claim of the once-great king has been proven false; all of Ozymandias's creations have crumbled and vanished, his civilisation is no more, and everything has been reduced to dust by the impersonal, indiscriminate, and destructive power of history. The demolished statue now serves as a stark reminder of one man's arrogance and a potent metaphor for the insignificance of humans in the grand scheme of things. First and foremost, Ozymandias serves as a metaphor for the transient nature of political power. However, Ozymandias is not just a representation of political authority; it may also serve as a metaphor for the arrogance and vanity of all humankind.