

To an Athlete Dying Young

by A. E. Housman (1859-1936)

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

To-day, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsmen of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields where glory does not stay
And early though the laurel grows
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut,
And silence sounds no worse than cheers
After earth has stopped the ears:

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honours out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laurelled head
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland briefer than a girl's.

Answer the questions below about the poem "To an Athlete Dying young."

1. The lines "fleet foot" and "townsman of a stiller town" are examples of

- a. Personification
- b. A simile
- c. Onomatopoeia
- d. Alliteration

2. The poem's rhyme scheme is

- a. ABCD
- b. ABAB
- c. ABCB
- d. AABB

3. In the first stanza, the athlete is carried "shoulder high" because

- a. He was too weak to walk.
- b. He was victorious in a race.
- c. He won a basketball game.
- d. He won a boxing match.

4. There are two instances when the athlete comes home "shoulder high." They are after winning his race and at

- a. His funeral
- b. His graduation
- c. A race he didn't win
- d. His grave

5. How old was the athlete at his death?

- a. 15
- b. 27
- c. We don't know.
- d. 19

6. "The road all runners come" (Line 5) is

- a. The race track
- b. All athletic competition
- c. Victory
- d. Death

7. "Eyes the shady night has shut" is an example of

- a. An allusion
- b. A metaphor
- c. Personification
- d. Irony

8. The passage, "the name died before the man" suggests that

- a. Fame is more short-lived than beauty.
- b. Athletes usually do not remain famous.
- c. Athletes' names are easily forgotten.
- d. Fame passes away quickly.

9. The word that best describes the mood of the poem is

- a. Sorrowful
- b. Cynical
- c. Joyful
- d. Positive

10. In the line "early though the laurel grows," laurel represents

- a. Success in life
- b. Youth and beauty
- c. Athletic achievement
- d. Death

11. The lines, "Smart lad to slip betimes away / From fields where glory does not stay" are an example of

- a. A simile
- b. Irony
- c. Hyperbole
- d. Elegy

12. The poem's theme is

- a. Death is inescapable.
- b. Fame does not last forever.
- c. Sports are pointless.
- d. Never give up on your dreams.

"To an Athlete Dying Young" Questions

Answer each of the questions below, referring back to the poem and re-reading carefully as you do. Cite evidence from the text – including specific passages, phrases, or words – in each of your responses.

1. The speaker of the poem addresses "you" throughout the poem. Who is the speaker addressing? What do we know about this person?

"You" is the runner/athlete. We know he was a very successful athlete who received a lot of praise in his lifetime because the speaker says "That time you won your town the race / We chaired you through the market place; / Man and boy / A-voiced cheering by, / And home we brought you shoulder high!" We also know he died young because of the title and other discussion of his death in the poem.

2. What don't we know about this person? Why do you think Housman chooses to omit these details – what impact does that choice have on the reader?

We don't know his name because Housman refers to him by "you" or "smart lad." We also don't know his age when he died, only that he was very young and in his prime as an athlete. This choice means that the reader understands this as more like a universal story than a story about a specific person or the tragedy of his death.

3. The first two stanzas of the poem center on one main image. Describe this image, as well as how it shifts between stanza 1 and stanza 2. Why do you think Housman begins the poem with this shift?

The image is of a group of people carrying the athlete "shoulder-high." In the first stanza, it's to cheer his victory in the race. In the second stanza, it's in his coffin at his funeral because he is now "Townsmen of a smaller town." This creates a very stark contrast. It shows the reader how quickly a person's fate can change.

4. At the beginning of stanza 3, Housman addresses the subject as "Smart lad." What does this imply, given the rest of the stanza? What tone does he set with this choice of words?

"Smart lad" implies Housman thinks he did a good thing by dying. Because even though he was at the top of his game, that fame and glory does not last. Housman says, "It wins quicker than the rose." The tone changes from this because we realize that the speaker is not really sad or mourning. He thinks it's good in a way that the athlete died young.

5. Paraphrase stanza 3 in your own words - what is Housman's basic meaning here?

Stanza 3 basically means that being a champion who is famous and celebrated and on top of life cannot last. Housman refers to athletics as "fields where glory does not stay." The athlete in the poem, even though he was great, would have lost his talent and his glory quickly.

6. Housman makes extensive use of metaphor to describe death throughout the poem. He mentions the actual word "dead" just once, at the very end. What is his likely purpose in doing this? Do you think this was an effective choice - why or why not? (Make sure you include at least 2 specific examples of such metaphors in your response.)

I think Housman uses metaphors to describe death because the reader needs to kind of figure out what happened. Like he says "the road all runners come" and "eyes the shady night has shut / cannot see the record cut." These are metaphors for death, but they also kind of refer to how youth, fame, and glory pass away too. So the metaphors have a dual meaning, which is very effective for the theme of the poem.

7. In Stanza 5, whom does Housman contrast the subject with? What is the purpose of this contrast?

In Stanza 5, Housman brings up the opposite type of athlete: "lads that wore their honours out." He means someone who keeps trying to be a great and famous athlete past their prime. His purpose is to show how the athlete who died young is more fortunate in some way because he will never face this disgrace.

8. What theme does the poem develop about fame and glory? How does Housman advance this theme over the course of the poem?

The poem develops the theme that fame and glory are very fleeting, even for great and successful people. He advances this through metaphor throughout the poem, by comparing the nature of glory to death itself - for most people, "the reme[mb]led before the man." He repeatedly portrays the athlete dying young as better off, because his life ended on a great victory, rather than the typical slow decline. So he is the lucky one, even though he died so young.

Module 1: Section 1D: Unpacking Multidimensionality: Grade 8 Sample Tasks

Participant Guide

Student Work Sample	Identified Targeted Reading and Writing Standards	Degree of Alignment	Rationale
<p>Sample Task 1:</p> <p>To an Athlete Dying Young by A. E. Housman (1859-1936)</p> <p>The time you won your town the race We chaired you through the market-place; Man and boy stood cheering by, And home we brought you shoulder-high.</p> <p>To-day, the road all runners come, Shoulder-high we bring you home, And set you at your threshold down, Townsmen of a stiffer town.</p> <p>Smart lad, to slip betimes away From fields where glory does not stay And early though the laurel grows It withers quicker than the rose.</p> <p>Eyes the shady night has shut Cannot see the record cut, And silence sounds no worse than cheers After earth has stopped the ears:</p> <p>Now you will not swell the rout Of lads that wore their honours out, Runners whom renown outran And the name died before the man.</p> <p>So set, before its echoes fade, The fleet foot on the sill of shade, And hold to the low lintel up The still-defended challenge-cup.</p> <p>And round that early-laurelled head Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead, And find unwithered on its curls The garland brierer than a girl's.</p> <p>Answer the questions below about the poem "To an Athlete Dying Young."</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The lines "fleet foot" and "townsmen of a stiffer town" are examples of <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Personification Alliteration Onomatopoeia Assonance The poem's rhyme scheme is <ol style="list-style-type: none"> ABCD ABAB ABCB ABBA In the first stanza, the athlete is carried "shoulder high" because <ol style="list-style-type: none"> He was too weak to walk. He was victorious in a race. He won a basketball game. He won a boxing match. There are two instances when the athlete carries home "shoulder high." They are after <ol style="list-style-type: none"> winning his race and at his funeral. His graduation. A race he didn't win. His grave. How old was the athlete at his death? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15 27 He doesn't know. 19 "The road all runners come" (line 5) is <ol style="list-style-type: none"> the race track. all athletic competition. Victory. death. "Eyes the shady night has shut" is an example of <ol style="list-style-type: none"> An allusion. metaphor. Personification. irony. The passage, "the name died before the man" suggests that <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Fame is more short-lived than beauty. Athletes usually do not remain famous. Athletes' names are easily forgotten. Fame passes away quickly. The word that best describes the mood of these lines is <ol style="list-style-type: none"> sorrowful. Content. joyful. Pensive. In the line "early though the laurel grows," laurel represents <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Success in life. Youth and beauty. Athletic achievement. Death. The lines, "Smart lad to slip betimes away / From fields where glory does not stay" are an example of <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Alliteration. Irony. Hyperbole. Metaphor. The poem's theme is <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Death is inevitable. Fame does not last forever. Sports are pointless. Never give up on your dreams. 	<p>RL.8.1 CITE RELEVANT TEXTUAL EVIDENCE to support analysis of <i>what the text says explicitly</i> as well as <i>inferences drawn</i> from the text.</p> <p>RL.8.2 Determine THEMES of a text, and analyze how they are developed through relationships of characters, setting and plot, citing textual evidence, paraphrasing or summarizing.</p> <p>RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific WORD CHOICES on meaning and TONE, including but not limited to ANALOGIES or ALLUSIONS to other texts.</p> <p>RL.8.10 By the end of the year, flexibly use a variety of comprehension strategies (i.e., questioning, monitoring, visualizing, inferencing, summarizing, synthesizing, using prior knowledge, determining importance) to read, comprehend and analyze GRADE-LEVEL APPROPRIATE, COMPLEX LITERARY TEXTS independently and proficiently.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> None/Weak</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partial</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Strong</p>	

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Module 1: Section 1D: Unpacking Multidimensionality: Grade 8 Sample Tasks

Facilitator’s Guide

Student Work Sample	Identified Targeted Reading and Writing Standards	Degree of Alignment	Rationale
<p>Sample Task 1:</p> <p>To an Athlete Dying Young by <u>A. E. Housman</u> (1859-1936)</p> <p>The time you won your town the race We chaired you through the market-place; Man and boy stood cheering by, And home we brought you shoulder-high.</p> <p>To-day, the road all runners come, Shoulder-high we bring you home, And set you at your threshold down, Townsmen of a stiller town.</p> <p>Smart lad, to slip betimes away From fields were glory does not stay And early though the laurel grows It withers quicker than the rose.</p> <p>Eyes the shady night has shut Cannot see the record cut, And silence sounds no worse than cheers After earth has stopped the ears:</p> <p>Now you will not swell the rout Of lads that wore their honours out, Runners whom renown outran And the name died before the man.</p> <p>So set, before its echoes fade, The fleet foot on the sill of shade, And hold to the low lintel up The still-defended challenge-cup.</p> <p>And round that early-laurelled head Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead, And find unwithered on its curls The garland briefer than a girl's.</p> <p>Continued onto page 2.</p>	<p>RL.8.1 CITE RELEVANT TEXTUAL EVIDENCE to support analysis of <i>what the text says explicitly</i> as well as inferences drawn from the text.</p> <p>RL.8.2 Determine THEMES of a text, and analyze how they are developed through relationships of characters, setting and plot, <i>citing textual evidence, paraphrasing or summarizing.</i></p> <p>RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific WORD CHOICES on meaning and TONE, including but not limited to ANALOGIES or ALLUSIONS to other texts.</p> <p>RL.8.10 By the end of the year, flexibly use a variety of comprehension strategies (<i>i.e., questioning, monitoring, visualizing, inferencing, summarizing, synthesizing, using prior knowledge, determining importance</i>) to read, comprehend and analyze GRADE-LEVEL APPROPRIATE, COMPLEX LITERARY TEXTS independently and proficiently.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> None/Weak <input type="checkbox"/> Partial <input type="checkbox"/> Strong</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Facilitator Notes</p> <p>Partial</p> <p>This assignment is partially aligned to the standards.</p> </div>	<p>Key Points to look/listen for and share:</p> <p>RL.8.1 While some questions require students to make inferences about the character and the basic narrative of the poem, the task does not capture the more critical part of this standard, which is citing relevant textual evidence to support these inferences. Thus, the task does not align to the depth and rigor of the required level of analysis in this standard. Additional multiple choice questions could be constructed with lines from the poem as the answer choices. This would allow students to “cite” relevant evidence to support analysis of the text.</p> <p>RL.8.2 The final question asks students to choose a theme statement from among several provided choices, but students do not have the opportunity to analyze how the theme is developed through relationships of characters, setting and plot. Students also are not asked to use textual evidence to support the determination and analysis of the theme. As a result, this task does not meet the</p>

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Student Work Sample	Identified Targeted Reading and Writing Standards	Degree of Alignment	Rationale
<p>Answer the questions below about the poem "To an Athlete Dying Young."</p> <p>1. The lines "fleet foot" and "townsman of a stiller town" are examples of</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A simile <input checked="" type="radio"/> B personification <input type="radio"/> C onomatopoeia <input type="radio"/> D alliteration</p> <p>2. The poem's rhyme scheme is</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A ABCD <input type="radio"/> B ABAB <input checked="" type="radio"/> C ABCB <input type="radio"/> D AABB</p> <p>3. In the first stanza, the athlete is carried "shoulder high" because</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A He was too weak to walk. <input checked="" type="radio"/> B He was victorious in a race. <input type="radio"/> C He won a basketball game. <input type="radio"/> D He won a boxing match.</p> <p>4. There are two instances when the athlete comes home "shoulder high." They are after</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> A winning his race and at his funeral. <input type="radio"/> B his graduation. <input type="radio"/> C a race he didn't win. <input type="radio"/> D his grave.</p> <p>5. How old was the athlete at his death?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A 15 <input type="radio"/> B 27 <input checked="" type="radio"/> C He don't know. <input type="radio"/> D 19</p> <p>6. "The road all runners come" (Line 5) is</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A The race track <input type="radio"/> B All athletic competition <input type="radio"/> C Victory <input checked="" type="radio"/> D Death</p> <p>7. "Eyes the shady night has shut" is an example of</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A An allusion <input checked="" type="radio"/> B metaphor <input type="radio"/> C personification <input type="radio"/> D irony</p> <p>8. The passage, "the name died before the man" suggests that</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Fame is more short-lived than beauty. <input type="radio"/> B Athletes usually do not remain famous. <input type="radio"/> C Athletes' names are easily forgotten. <input checked="" type="radio"/> D Fame passes away quickly.</p> <p>9. The word that best describes the mood of them poem is</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> A sorrowful <input type="radio"/> B cynical <input type="radio"/> C joyful <input type="radio"/> D positive</p> <p>10. In the line "early though the laurel grows," laurel represents</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A success in life <input type="radio"/> B youth and beauty <input checked="" type="radio"/> C athletic achievement <input type="radio"/> D death</p> <p>11. The lines, "Smart lad to slip betimes away / From fields where glory does not stay" are an example of</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A simile <input type="radio"/> B irony <input checked="" type="radio"/> C hyperbole <input type="radio"/> D imagery</p> <p>12. The poem's theme is</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Death is inescapable. <input checked="" type="radio"/> B Fame does not last forever. <input type="radio"/> C Sports are pointless. <input type="radio"/> D Never give up on your dreams.</p>			<p>depth and rigor of the comprehension and analysis required in the standard.</p> <p>RL.8.4 Several questions call attention to specific words and phrases within the text. The first question, for example, asks students to identify the literary device exemplified by the lines "fleet foot" and "townsman of a stiller town" (alliteration). These questions mostly represent isolated practice with identifying a literary device or deciphering a specific phrase, so they do not work to build students' understanding of the impact of words on meaning and tone in the poem. Again, beyond identifying specific literary devices, students do not have to demonstrate an understanding of the poem's tone and meaning. Thus, the task does not align to the level of analysis required in the standard.</p> <p>RL.8.10 The assignment allows students to engage with a worthwhile, grade-appropriate text. Students are reading independently and have freedom to apply comprehension strategies (if learned and practiced) as needed. The text exhibits exceptional literary craft, using imagery, metaphor and irony to develop a complex theme and create an intended meaning and tone.</p>

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Student Work Sample	Identified Targeted Reading and Writing Standards	Degree of Alignment	Rationale
			The problem, however, is that the task does not require students to analyze the poem deeply, and there is no expectation that students draw on specific details and language to support their responses.
<p>Sample Task 2:</p> <p>To an Athlete Dying Young by A. E. Housman (1859-1936) The time you won your town the race We chaired you through the market-place; Man and boy stood cheering by, And home we brought you shoulder-high.</p> <p>To-day, the road all runners come, Shoulder-high we bring you home, And set you at your threshold down, Townsmen of a stiller town.</p> <p>Smart lad, to slip betimes away From fields where glory does not stay And early though the laurel grows It withers quicker than the rose.</p> <p>Eyes the shady night has shut Cannot see the record cut, And silence sounds no worse than cheers After earth has stopped the ears:</p> <p>Now you will not swell the rout Of lads that wore their honours out, Runners whom renown outran And the name died before the man.</p> <p>So set, before its echoes fade, The fleet foot on the sill of shade, And hold to the low lintel up The still-defended challenge-cup.</p> <p>And round that early-laurelled head Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead, And find unwithered on its curls The garland briefer than a girl's.</p>	<p>RL.8.1 CITE RELEVANT TEXTUAL EVIDENCE to support analysis of <i>what the text says explicitly</i> as well as inferences drawn from the text.</p> <p>RL.8.2 Determine THEMES of a text, and analyze how they are developed through relationships of characters, setting and plot, <i>citing textual evidence, paraphrasing or summarizing.</i></p> <p>RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific WORD CHOICES on meaning and TONE, including but not limited to ANALOGIES or ALLUSIONS to other texts.</p> <p>RL.8.10 By the end of the year, flexibly use a variety of comprehension strategies (<i>i.e., questioning, monitoring, visualizing, inferencing, summarizing, synthesizing, using prior knowledge, determining importance</i>) to read, comprehend and analyze GRADE-LEVEL APPROPRIATE, COMPLEX LITERARY TEXTS independently and proficiently.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> None/Weak <input type="checkbox"/> Partial <input type="checkbox"/> Strong</p> <p>Facilitator Notes:</p> <p>Strong</p> <p>This assignment is strongly aligned to the standards.</p>	<p>Key Points to look/listen for and share:</p> <p>RL.8.1 The task directions require students to cite textual evidence, including specific language from the poem, to support their responses to each question. The questions also demand an analysis of what the text says explicitly and implicitly. Students must read carefully and focus on key ideas and details.</p> <p>RL.8.2 The final question asks students to determine a theme based on a theme topic of “fame and glory”. It also asks students to analyze how the author advances the theme. The alignment would be stronger if the question asked students to analyze how the author advances the theme through relationships of characters, setting and plot. The task directions require students to cite evidence from the text in the response as well.</p> <p>RL.8.4 Question 4 and 5 direct students to analyze the impact of word choices on meaning or tone. Question 6 also helps students unpack the author’s purpose for and effectiveness of figurative language.</p>

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Student Work Sample	Identified Targeted Reading and Writing Standards	Degree of Alignment	Rationale
<p style="text-align: center;">"To an Athlete Dying Young" Questions</p> <p>Answer each of the questions below, referring back to the poem and re-reading carefully as you do. Cite evidence from the text—including specific passages, phrases, or words—in each of your responses.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The speaker of the poem addresses "you" throughout the poem. Who is the speaker addressing? What do we know about this person? <p><i>"You" is the runner/athlete. We know it was a very successful athlete who received a lot of praise in his lifetime because the speaker says "that time you won your town the race, we crowned you triumph the market place / Man and boy stood cheering by / and here we brought you shoulder high!" We also know he died young because of the title and a stanza describing his death in the poem.</i></p> What don't we know about this person? Why do you think Housman chooses to omit these details—what impact does that choice have on the reader? <p><i>We don't know his name because Housman refers to him by "you" or "smart lad." We also don't know his age when he died, only that he was very young and in his prime as an athlete. This choice makes the reader understand that as more like a universal story than a story about a specific person or the tragedy of his death.</i></p> The first two stanzas of the poem center on a human image. Describe this image, as well as how it shifts between stanza 1 and stanza 2. Why do you think Housman begins the poem with this image? <p><i>The image is of a group of people carrying the athlete "shoulder high." In the first stanza, it's to cheer his victory with the race. In the second stanza, it's in his coffin as his funeral because he is now "buried in a shallow tomb." This creates a very stark contrast. It shows the reader how quickly a person's fate can change.</i></p> At the beginning of stanza 3, Housman addresses the subject as "smart lad." What does this imply, given the rest of the poem? What tone does he set with this choice of words? <p><i>"Smart lad" implies Housman thinks he did a good thing by dying. Because even though he was at the top of his game, that fame and glory does not last. Housman says "He wins quicker than the nose." The tone changes from this because we realize that the speaker isn't really sad or mourning the death of the athlete but is glad he died young.</i></p> Paraphrase stanza 3 in your own words—what is Housman's basic meaning here? <p><i>Stanza 3 basically means that being a champion who is famous and celebrated and on top of life cannot last. Housman refers to athletes as "fields where they do not stay." The athlete in the poem, even though he was great, would have lost his talent and his glory quickly.</i></p> Housman uses extensive use of metaphor to describe death throughout the poem. He mentions the "raced wind" twice, just once, at the end and what is his likely purpose in doing that? Do you think this was an effective choice—why or why not? (Make sure you include at least 2 specific examples of such metaphors in your response.) <p><i>I think Housman uses metaphors to describe death because the reader needs to kind of figure out what happened. Like he says "the raddled runners come" and "when the shady night has shut / cannot see the record cut!" These are metaphors for death, but they also kind of refer to how fame, glory and glory pass away too. So the metaphors have a dual meaning, which is why effective for the theme of the poem.</i></p> In stanza 5, Housman brings up the opposite type of athlete: "lads that were their honours out / He means someone who keeps trying to be a great and famous athlete past their prime. His purpose is to show how the athlete who died young is more fortunate in some ways because he will never face this disgrace. What theme does the poem develop about fame and glory? How does Housman advance this theme over the course of the poem? <p><i>The poem develops the theme that fame and glory are very fleeting, even for great and successful people. He advances this through metaphors throughout the poem, by comparing the nature of glory to death itself. For most people, the name that follows the man "is respectively bringing with athletes death young as better off because his life ended on a great victory rather than the typical slow decline back to the lucky one, even that he died so young.</i></p> 			<p>RL.8.10 The assignment allows students to engage with a worthwhile, grade-appropriate text. Students are reading and analyzing independently and have freedom to apply comprehension strategies (if learned and practiced) as needed. The text exhibits exceptional literary craft, using imagery, metaphor and irony to develop a complex theme and create an intended meaning and tone. The questions require students to examine and explain specific stanzas, word choice and literary devices. They also allow students to articulate their ideas about the text in writing with specific, relevant references from the poem.</p> <p>NOTE: Both multiple choice questions and short answer questions can be crafted with weak or strong alignment. The point of the included grade 8 sample tasks is to illustrate that the construction of any task must be purposeful and intentional in order to allow students to experience the full depth and rigor highlighted by the multidimensionality in the standards. In this case, the purposeful construction of the short answer questions in sample task 2 allowed students to engage in analysis, explain their thinking by writing about text, and cite relevant evidence to support their analysis of the text.</p>

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