

English Literature and History

Assignment 15

- Memorize **Parts 1–3** of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poem, “Ozymandias.”
- Read Samuel Pepys, “The Great Fire of London” and answer questions in your study guide on the reading. We will talk about the bubonic plague, conflagration and natural disasters in our next class. It should be an exciting class.
- We will be reading John Dryden’s poetic account of the Fire of London in class (below). Please print it out and take to read for this Friday.
- The Classification and Division Essay will be due on the first Friday in February. You must write your four-point outline for me next week. Be sure to have a topic (a main idea) and at least three divisions of that topic. Remember that you have to have some reasonable method of dividing your topic. In the following example, pet owners are divided *according to how they treat their respective pet*.
 1. Topic (Main Idea): I have carefully observed pet owners and have discovered that there are three kinds, according to the way they treat their pet—whether it is a dog, cat, bird, hamster, or rabbit.
 2. First Classification (Topic Sentence 1): First, there are those who neglect or even abuse their pet, inciting observers to wonder why they even own one.
 3. Second Classification (Topic Sentence 2): Second, there are those who indulge their pet, treating as if it were a darling baby.
 4. Third Classification (Topic Sentence 3): The most respectable of pet owners are those who treat their pet as an animal—though it might be much beloved—, and not as a person.
- You will soon see a strange letter: Who wrote it? What is it about?
- Read English History Chapter 15 and answer the questions in your study guide. Although we corrected the history assignments in class, you can re-check your answers with those given online.
- I hope that you have not forgotten about the children’s book that you will be writing. By now you should have some vague idea of what you want to write about. Now I would like you to choose a specific person (monarch, prime minister, etc.) or event (war, battle, etc.) and be ready to tell me next week.



Long-Range Assignments

- There will be a test on **the third week of February** on the Elizabethan and Stuart Periods—*no* history this time. At that time the Guy Fawkes point will be given out. If the current king gets it, though, his subjects will have to endure another four weeks of tax tyranny unless someone spends money on raising an army!
- The Classification and Division Essay will be due on **the first Friday in February**.

The Fire of London

By John Dryden

Yet London, empress of the northern clime,
By an high fate thou greatly didst expire;
Great as the world's, which, at the death of time
Must fall, and rise a nobler frame by fire!

As when some dire usurper Heaven provides,
To scourge his country with a lawless sway;
His birth perhaps some petty village hides,
And sets his cradle out of fortune's way.¹

Till fully ripe his swelling fate breaks out,
And hurries him to mighty mischiefs on:
His prince, surprised at first, no ill could doubt,
And wants the power to meet it when 'tis known.

Such was the rise of this prodigious fire,
Which, in mean buildings first obscurely bred,
From thence did soon to open streets aspire,
And straight to palaces and temples spread.

The diligence of trades and noiseful gain,
And luxury more late, asleep were laid:
All was the night's; and in her silent reign
No sound the rest of nature did invade.

In this deep quiet, from what source unknown,
Those seeds of fire their fatal birth disclose;
And first few scattering sparks about were blown,
Big with the flames that to our ruin rose.

Then in some close-pent room it crept along,
And, smouldering as it went, in silence fed;
Till the infant monster, with devouring strong,
Walked boldly upright with exalted head.

Now like some rich or mighty murderer,
Too great for prison, which he breaks with gold;
Who fresher for new mischiefs does appear,
And dares the world to tax him with the old:

So 'scapes the insulting fire his narrow jail,
And makes small outlets into open air:

There the fierce winds his tender force assail,
And beat him downward to his first repair.

The winds, like crafty courtesans, withheld
His flames from burning, but to blow them more:
And every fresh attempt he is repelled
With faint denials weaker than before.

And now no longer letted of his prey,
He leaps up at it with enraged desire:
O'erlooks the neighbours with a wide survey,
And nods at every house his threatening fire.

The ghosts of traitors from the bridge descend,
With bold fanatic spectres to rejoice:
About the fire into a dance they bend,
And sing their sabbath notes with feeble voice.

Our guardian angel saw them where they sate
Above the palace of our slumbering king:
He sighed, abandoning his charge to fate,
And, drooping, oft looked back upon the wing.

At length the crackling noise and dreadful blaze
Called up some waking lover to the sight;
And long it was ere he the rest could raise,
Whose heavy eyelids yet were full of night.

The next to danger, hot pursued by fate,
Half-clothed, half-naked, hastily retire:
And frightened mothers strike their breasts too late,
For helpless infants left amidst the fire.

Their cries soon waken all the dwellers near;
Now murmuring noises rise in every street:
The more remote run stumbling with their fear,
And in the dark men jostle as they meet.

So weary bees in little cells repose;
But if night-robbers lift the well-stored hive,
An humming through their waxen city grows,
And out upon each other's wings they drive.

Now streets grow thronged and busy as by day:
Some run for buckets to the hallowed quire:

¹ Most likely the "dire usurper" talked about here is Oliver Cromwell, who was the Protector of England soon after the Civil War. In the poem Dryden is comparing the outbreak of the fire to the rise of Oliver Cromwell who was born in the obscure "petty village" of Huntington. (Church, p. x)

Some cut the pipes, and some the engines play;
And some more bold mount ladders to the fire.

In vain: for from the east a Belgian wind
His hostile breath through the dry rafters sent;
The flames impelled soon left their foes behind,
And forward with a wanton fury went.

A quay of fire ran all along the shore,
And lightened all the river with a blaze:
The wakened tides began again to roar,
And wondering fish in shining waters gaze.

Old father Thames raised up his reverend head,
But feared the fate of Simois would return:
Deep in his ooze he sought his sedgy bed,
And shrunk his waters back into his urn.

The fire, meantime, walks in a broader gross;
To either hand his wings he opens wide:
He wades the streets, and straight he reaches cross,
And plays his longing flames on the other side.

At first they warm, then scorch, and then they take;
Now with long necks from side to side they feed:
At length, grown strong, their mother-fire forsake,
And a new colony of flames succeed.

To every nobler portion of the town
The curling billows roll their restless tide:
In parties now they straggle up and down,
As armies, unopposed, for prey divide.

One mighty squadron with a side-wind sped,
Through narrow lanes his cumbered fire does haste,
By powerful charms of gold and silver led,
The Lombard bankers and the 'Change to waste.

Another backward to the Tower would go,
And slowly eats his way against the wind:
But the main body of the marching foe
Against the imperial palace is designed.

Now day appears, and with the day the King,
Whose early care had robbed him of his rest:
Far off the cracks of falling houses ring,
And shrieks of subjects pierce his tender breast.

Near as he draws, thick harbingers of smoke
With gloomy pillars cover all the place;
Whose little intervals of night are broke
By sparks, that drive against his sacred face.

More than his guards, his sorrows made him known,
And pious tears, which down his cheeks did shower;
The wretched in his grief forgot their own;
So much the pity of a king has power.

He wept the flames of what he loved so well,
And what so well had merited his love:
For never prince in grace did more excel,
Or royal city more in duty strove.

Nor with an idle care did he behold:
Subjects may grieve, but monarchs must redress;
He cheers the fearful, and commends the bold,
And makes despairers hope for good success.

Himself directs what first is to be done,
And orders all the succours which they bring,
The helpful and the good about him run,
And form an army worthy such a king.

He sees the dire contagion spread so fast,
That, where it seizes, all relief is vain:
And therefore must unwillingly lay waste
That country, which would else the foe maintain.

The powder blows up all before the fire:
The amazed flames stand gathered on a heap;
And from the precipice's brink retire,
Afraid to venture on so large a leap.

Thus fighting fires a while themselves consume,
But straight, like Turks forced on to win or die,
They first lay tender bridges of their fume,
And o'er the breach in unctuous vapours fly.

Part stay for passage, till a gust of wind
Ships o'er their forces in a shining sheet:
Part creeping under ground their journey blind,
And climbing from below their fellows meet.

Thus to some desert plain, or old woodside,
Dire night-hags come from far to dance their round;
And o'er broad rivers on their fiends they ride,
Or sweep in clouds above the blasted ground.

No help avails: for hydra-like, the fire
Lifts up his hundred heads to aim his way;
And scarce the wealthy can one half retire,
Before he rushes in to share the prey.

The rich grow suppliant, and the poor grow proud;
Those offer mighty gain, and these ask more:
So void of pity is the ignoble crowd,
When others' ruin may increase their store.

As those who live by shores with joy behold
Some wealthy vessel split or stranded nigh;
And from the rocks leap down for shipwrecked gold,
And seek the tempests which the others fly:

So these but wait the owners' last despair,
And what's permitted to the flames invade;
Even from their jaws they hungry morsels tear,
And on their backs the spoils of Vulcan lade.

The days were all in this lost labour spent;
And when the weary king gave place to night,
His beams he to his royal brother lent,
And so shone still in his reflective light.

Night came, but without darkness or repose,--
A dismal picture of the general doom,
Where souls, distracted when the trumpet blows,
And half unready, with their bodies come.

Those who have homes, when home they do repair,
To a last lodging call their wandering friends:
Their short uneasy sleeps are broke with care,
To look how near their own destruction tends.

Those who have none, sit round where once it was,
And with full eyes each wonted room require;
Haunting the yet warm ashes of the place,
As murdered men walk where they did expire.

Some stir up coals, and watch the vestal fire,
Others in vain from sight of ruin run;
And, while through burning labyrinths they retire,
With loathing eyes repeat what they would shun.

The most in fields like herded beasts lie down,
To dews obnoxious on the grassy floor;
And while their babes in sleep their sorrows drown,
Sad parents watch the remnants of their store.

While by the motion of the flames they guess
What streets are burning now, and what are near;
An infant waking to the paps would press,
And meets, instead of milk, a falling tear.

No thought can ease them but their sovereign's care,
Whose praise the afflicted as their comfort sing:
Even those whom want might drive to just despair,
Think life a blessing under such a king.

Meantime he sadly suffers in their grief,
Out-weeps an hermit, and out-prays a saint:
All the long night he studies their relief,
How they may be supplied, and he may want.

O God, said he, thou patron of my days,
Guide of my youth in exile and distress!
Who me, unfriended, brought'st by wondrous ways,
The kingdom of my fathers to possess:

Be thou my judge, with what unwearied care
I since have laboured for my people's good;
To bind the bruises of a civil war,
And stop the issues of their wasting blood.

Thou who hast taught me to forgive the ill,
And recompense, as friends, the good misled;
If mercy be a precept of thy will,
Return that mercy on thy servant's head.

Or if my heedless youth has stepped astray,
Too soon forgetful of thy gracious hand;
On me alone thy just displeasure lay,
But take thy judgments from this mourning land.

We all have sinned, and thou hast laid us low,
As humble earth from whence at first we came:
Like flying shades before the clouds we show,
And shrink like parchment in consuming flame.

O let it be enough what thou hast done;
When spotted Deaths ran armed through every street,
With poisoned darts which not the good could shun,
The speedy could out-fly, or valiant meet.

The living few, and frequent funerals then,
Proclaimed thy wrath on this forsaken place;
And now those few who are returned again,
Thy searching judgments to their dwellings trace.

O pass not, Lord, an absolute decree,
Or bind thy sentence unconditional!
But in thy sentence our remorse foresee,
And in that foresight this thy doom recall.

Thy threatenings, Lord, as thine thou mayst revoke:
But if immutable and fixed they stand,
Continue still thyself to give the stroke,
And let not foreign foes oppress thy land.

The Eternal heard, and from the heavenly quire
Chose out the cherub with the flaming sword;
And bade him swiftly drive the approaching fire
From where our naval magazines were stored.

The blessed minister his wings displayed,
And like a shooting star he cleft the night:
He charged the flames, and those that disobeyed
He lashed to duty with his sword of light.

The fugitive flames chastised went forth to prey
On pious structures, by our fathers reared;
By which to heaven they did affect the way,
Ere faith in churchmen without works was heard.

The wanting orphans saw, with watery eyes,
Their founder's charity in dust laid low;
And sent to God their ever-answered cries,
For He protects the poor, who made them so.

Nor could thy fabric, Paul's, defend thee long,
Though thou wert sacred to thy Maker's praise:
Though made immortal by a poet's song;
And poets' songs the Theban walls could raise.

The daring flames peeped in, and saw from far
The awful beauties of the sacred quire:
But since it was profaned by civil war,
Heaven thought it fit to have it purged by fire.

Now down the narrow streets it swiftly came,
And widely opening did on both sides prey:
This benefit we sadly owe the flame,
If only ruin must enlarge our way.

And now four days the sun had seen our woes:
Four nights the moon beheld the incessant fire:
It seemed as if the stars more sickly rose,
And farther from the feverish north retire.

In th' empyrean heaven, the blessed abode,
The Thrones and the Dominions prostrate lie,
Not daring to behold their angry God;
And a hushed silence damps the tuneful sky.

At length the Almighty cast a pitying eye,
And mercy softly touched his melting breast:
He saw the town's one half in rubbish lie,
And eager flames drive on to storm the rest.

An hollow crystal pyramid he takes,
In firmamental waters dipt above;
Of it a broad extinguisher he makes,
And hoods the flames that to their quarry drove.

The vanquished fires withdraw from every place,
Or, full with feeding, sink into a sleep:
Each household genius shows again his face,
And from the hearths the little Lares creep.