Ovid's *Metamorphoses* : Daedalus and Icarus

But Daedalus abhorred the Isle of Crete-- and his long exile on that sea-girt shore,  increased the love of his own native place."Though Minos blocks escape by sea and land."  He said, "The unconfined skies remain   
though Minos may be lord of all the world his sceptre is not regnant of the air, and by that untried way is our escape."   
      **This said, he turned his mind to arts unknown and nature unrevealed**.

He fashioned quills and feathers in due order -- deftly formed from small to large, as any rustic pipe prom straws unequal slants.

He bound with thread the middle feathers, and the lower fixed with pliant wax; till so, in gentle curves arranged, he bent them to the shape of birds.   
 *305* While he was working, his son Icarus, with smiling countenance and unaware of danger to himself, perchance would chase the feathers, ruffled by the shifting breeze,  or soften with his thumb the yellow wax, and by his playfulness retard the work his anxious father planned.   
       But when at last the father finished it, he poised himself, and lightly floating in the winnowed air waved his great feathered wings with bird-like ease.   
    And, likewise he had fashioned for his son such wings; before they ventured in the air he said,

"My son, I caution you to keep the middle way, for if your pinions dip  too low the waters may impede your flight; and if they soar too high the sun may scorch them. Fly midway. Gaze not at the boundless sky, far Ursa Major and Bootes next.  Nor on Orion with his flashing brand, but follow my safe guidance."   
      As he spoke he fitted on his son the plumed wings with trembling hands, while down his withered cheeks the tears were falling. Then he gave his son a last kiss, and upon his gliding wings assumed a careful lead solicitous.   
       As when the bird leads forth her tender young, from high-swung nest to try the yielding air; so he prevailed on willing Icarus; encouraged and instructed him in all the fatal art; and as he waved his wings looked backward on his son.   
       Beneath their flight, the fisherman while casting his long rod, or the tired shepherd leaning on his crook, or the rough plowman as he raised his eyes,   
**astonished might observe them on the wing, and worship them as Gods.**   
      Upon the left they passed by Samos, Juno's sacred isle; Delos and Paros too, were left behind; and on the right Lebinthus and Calymne, fruitful in honey. Proud of his success, the foolish Icarus forsook his guide,   
and, bold in vanity, began to soar,   
rising upon his wings to touch the skies; but as he neared the scorching sun, its heat softened the fragrant wax that held his plumes;   
                         and heat increasing melted the soft wax-- he waved his naked arms instead of wings,   
                         with no more feathers to sustain his flight.   
                         And as he called upon his father's name his voice was smothered in the dark blue sea, now called Icarian from the dead boy's name.   
      The unlucky father, not a father, called, "Where are you, Icarus?" and "Where are you?   
      In what place shall I seek you, Icarus?"   
      He called again; and then he saw the wings of his dear Icarus, floating on the waves; and he began to rail and curse his art.   
      He found the body on an island shore, now called Icaria, and at once prepared to bury the unfortunate remains; but while he labored a pert partridge near, observed him from the covert of an oak, and whistled his unnatural delight.   
      Know you the cause? 'Twas then a single bird, the first one of its kind. 'Twas never seen before the sister of Daedalus had brought him Perdix, her dear son, to be his pupil.   
      And as the years went by the gifted youth began to rival his instructor's art.   
 He took the jagged backbone of a fish,   
 and with it as a model made a saw,   
 with sharp teeth fashioned from a strip of iron.   
     And he was first to make two arms of iron, smooth hinged upon the center, so that one would make a pivot while the other, turned, described a circle.

Wherefore Daedalus enraged and envious, sought to slay the youth   
 and cast him headlong from Minerva's fane,--  then spread the rumor of an accident.   
      But Pallas, goddess of ingenious men, saving the pupil changed him to a bird, and in the middle of the air he flew on feathered wings; and so his active mind-- and vigor of his genius were absorbed into his wings and feet; although the name of Perdix was retained.   
 *395* The Partridge hides in shaded places by the leafy trees its nested eggs among the bush's twigs; nor does it seek to rise in lofty flight, for it is mindful of its former fall.

**I**

**Part A Question:** In **“**Daedalus and Icarus,” what do the lines “he turned his mind to arts unknown / and nature unrevealed” (lines 9-10) imply about Daedalus and his invention?

a. that his invention will bring him wealth and fame

b. that his invention will be something beyond common understanding

c. that the primary motive for his invention is revenge

d. that he is nervous about the success of his

invention

**Part B Question:** Which quotation provides the **best** support for the answer to Part A?

a. “But Daedalus abhorred the Isle of Crete— / and his long exile on that sea-girt shore, / increased the love of his own native place.” (lines 1-3)

b. “While he was working, his son Icarus, / with smiling countenance and unaware / of danger tohimself, perchance would chase / the feathers, ruffled by the shifting breeze, / or soften with his thumb the yellow wax,” (lines 17-21)

c. “. . . ‘My son, I caution you to keep / the middle way, for if your pinions dip / too low the waters may impede your flight;’” (lines 30-32)

d. “Beneath their flight, / the fisherman while casting his long rod, / or the tired shepherd leaning on his crook, / or the rough plowman as he raised his eyes, / astonished might observe them on the wing, / and worship them as Gods.” (lines 50-55)

**II.**

**Part A Question:** In “Daedalus and Icarus,” how does the poet structure lines 81-111 to add meaning to the events of the poem?

1. He includes a flashback of the story of Perdix to show that Daedalus wanted to kill Perdix, and now Perdix enjoys a kind of revenge by seeing Daedalus mourning the death of his son.

b. He includes a flashback of the story of Perdix to show that Perdix now lives in the shade but Icarus died trying to reach the sun.

c. He includes a prediction that foretells that Daedalus will soon have to bury Perdix as well as his own son.

d. He includes a prediction that foretells that Perdix will be fated to live an obscure life when he should have been a famous inventor.

**Part B Question:** Which quotation from the poem **best** supports the answer to Part A?

a. “. . . a pert partridge near, /

observed him from the covert of an oak, /and whistled his unnatural delight.” (lines 81-83)

b. “'Twas then a single bird, / the first one of its kind. 'Twas never seen / before the sister of Daedalus had brought him Perdix, her dear son, to be his pupil.” (lines 84-87)

c. “He took the jagged backbone of a fish,/ and with it as a model made a saw, / with sharp teeth fashioned from a strip of iron.” (lines 90-93)

d. “The Partridge hides / in shaded

places by the leafy trees / its nested eggs among the bush's twigs; / nor does it seek to rise in lofty flight, / for it is mindful of its former fall.” (lines107-110)

**III**

**Part A Question:** What do lines 38-45 from

Ovid’s poem **most** suggest about Daedalus?

a. Daedalus is worried about the quality of the wings.

b. Daedalus is sad to leave the Isle of Crete.

c. Daedalus is a caring parent.

d. Daedalus is proud of his invention.

**Part B Question:** From the list below, select **two** quotations that provide additional evidence tosupport the answer to Part A. Drag and drop youranswers into the boxes labeled “Evidence.”

a) “He said, ‘The unconfined skies

remain / though Minos may be lord of

all the world /his sceptre is not regnant

of the air, / and by that untried way is

our escape.’" (lines 5-8)

b) “. . . He fashioned quills / and feathers

in due order — deftly formed / from

small to large, as any rustic pipe /

prom straws unequal slants. He bound

with thread / the middle feathers, and

the lower fixed / with pliant wax; till

so, in gentle curves /arranged, he bent

them to the shape of birds.” (lines 10-16)

c) “But when at last / the father finished it, he

poised himself, / and lightly floating in the

winnowed air / waved his great feathered

wings with bird-like ease.” (lines 24-27)

d) “. . . ‘My son, I caution you to keep

/ the middle way, for if your pinions dip /

too low the waters may impede your

flight; / and if they soar too high the sun

may scorch them. / Fly midway. Gaze

not at the boundless sky, . . . but follow

my safe guidance.’” (lines 30-37)

e) “And as he called

upon his father's name / his voice was

smothered in the dark blue sea, / now called

*Icarian* from the dead boy's name.” (lines 69-71)

f) “The unlucky father, not a father, called, /

‘Where are you, Icarus?’ and ‘Where

are you? / In what place shall I seek

you, Icarus?’ / He called again; and

then he saw the wings / of his dear

Icarus, floating on the waves; / and he

began to rail and curse his art.” (lines

72-77)

**To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph**   
  
Consider Icarus, pasting those sticky wings on,  
testing that strange little tug at his shoulder blade,  
and think of that first flawless moment over the lawn   
of the labyrinth. Think of the difference it made!  
There below are the trees, as awkward as camels;  
and here are the shocked starlings pumping past  
and think of innocent Icarus who is doing quite well.  
Larger than a sail, over the fog and the blast  
of the plushy ocean, he goes. Admire his wings!  
Feel the fire at his neck and see how casually  
he glances up and is caught, wondrously tunneling  
into that hot eye. Who cares that he fell back to the sea?  
See him acclaiming the sun and come plunging down   
while his sensible daddy goes straight into town.

**IV**

**Part A Question:** In line 11 of Sexton’s poem,

what does the use of the idea of “tunneling”

reveal about Icarus at this point in the poem?

a. He is engaging in an intensely concentrated action.

b. He is doomed to become the victim of an

accident.

c. He is trying to visualize an impossible goal.

d. He is forced to begin a puzzling quest.

**Part B Question:** Which words from Sexton’s poem **best** help the reader understand the meaning of “tunneling”?

1. “Admire his wings” (line 9)

b. “Feel the fire at his neck. . . .” (line 10)

c. “. . . he glances up and is caught” (11)

d. “Who cares that he fell back . . . .” (ln 12)

V.

**Question:** Determine the central idea in

Sexton’s poem, as well as specific details that help develop that idea over the course of the poem. From the list of possible central ideas, drag the **best** statement to the “Central Idea” box in the table. Then drag and drop into the table **three** supporting details in order to show how that idea is developed over the course of the poem.

Central Idea: Select a Letter below

Supporting Detail: Select a number

Supporting Detail: Select a number

Supporting Detail: Select a number

**Possible Central Ideas**

A) Individuals who take unusual paths in life may regret their choices later.

B) Protective parents keep their children from

learning important life lessons.

C) Risk-takers are admirable people because they are most likely to experience the highs and lows of life.

D) People who follow society’s rules are most likely to have productive futures.

**Possible Supporting Details**

5) “Consider Icarus, pasting those sticky wings on,” (line 1)

6) “. . . think of that first flawless moment over the lawn / of the labyrinth. Think of the difference it made!” (lines 3-4)

7) “. . . here are the shocked starlings pumping past” (line 6)

8) “Larger than a sail, over the fog and the blast / of the plushy ocean, he goes. . . .” (lines 8-9)

9) “. . . see how casually / he glances up and is caught, . . .” (lines 10-11)

10) “. . . Who cares that he fell back to the sea?”

(line 12)

11) “See him acclaiming the sun and come plunging down” (line 13)

**VI**

**Part A Question:** Which statement summarizes a key difference between the excerpts from the poem by Ovid and the poem by Sexton?

a. Ovid portrays Icarus as naïve, whereas Sexton portrays Icarus as wise.

b. Ovid emphasizes Icarus’s adventurousness, whereas Sexton emphasizes Icarus’s timidity.

c. Ovid believes the goddess Pallas is the true hero of the myth, whereas Sexton believes Daedalus is the true hero.

d. Ovid considers Icarus’s flight an act of human arrogance, whereas Sexton considers it an act of heroism.

**Part B Question:** Which **two** quotations **best**

support the answer to Part A? Choose **one** from Ovid’s poem and **one** from Sexton’s poem.

a. “. . . unaware / of danger to himself, perchance would chase/ the feathers, . . .” (Ovid, lines 18- 20)

b. “. . . Proud of his success, / the foolish Icarus forsook his guide,” (Ovid, lines 60-61)

c. “But Pallas, goddess of ingenious men, /

saving the pupil changed him to a bird,” (Ovid, lines 100-101)

d. “. . . testing that strange little tug at his

shoulder blade. . . .” (Sexton, line 2)

e. “There below are the trees, as awkward as

camels; ” (Sexton, line 5)

f. “See him acclaiming the sun and come

plunging down / while his sensible daddy goes straight into town.” (Sexton, lines 13-14)

VII

**Question:** Use what you have learned from

reading “Daedalus and Icarus” by Ovid and “To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph” by Anne Sexton to write an essay that provides an analysis of how Sexton transforms “Daedalus and Icarus.”

The writing prompt requires students to develop

ideas by drawing evidence from two texts,

organizing ideas from the texts to build a

meaningful literary analysis.

*The student’s response*

*provides strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of*

*what* ***the text says explicitly****.*

*provides strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of*

***inferences drawn from the text****.*