

Name: _____ Date: _____

Analyzing Poetry

Below is John Townsend Trowbridge's poem "Darius Green and His Flying Machine."* The notes on the sides define words that you might not know. (We left two of the definitions for you to write. Look the words up in a dictionary.) After you read the poem a few times, complete the activity on the next two pages.

Darius Green and His Flying Machine

In 1867, when this poem was first published, *Yankee* was a nickname for people in the northern U.S. It still means that today, but it can also mean simply "an American."

The *tail* of a coat is the long section that hangs down at the back.

A *post* is a pole that is fixed in an upright position and used to support something, such as a sign.

Lad is another word for _____.

A *stake* is a wooden or metal post that is stuck in the ground as part of a fence, to mark the edge of someone's property, or for some other reason.

A *rail* is a bar that goes from one post (or stake) to another to create some kind of barrier.

This is not a nice thing to call someone! If you call someone a *dunce*, what do you mean?

1 If ever there lived a Yankee lad,
Wise or otherwise, good or bad,
Who, seeing the birds fly, didn't jump
With flapping arms from stake or stump,
5 Or, spreading the tail
Of his coat for a sail,
Take a soaring leap from post or rail,
And wonder why
9 He couldn't fly,
And flap and flutter and wish and try—
If ever you knew a country dunce
Who didn't try that as often as once,
13 All I can say is, that's a sign
He never would do for a hero of mine.

—John Townsend Trowbridge



*This is actually the beginning of a longer poem about a 14-year-old boy named Darius Green who builds a pair of giant wings and tests them out by jumping off a ledge in his family's barn. Alas, his effort to fly is not successful—but don't worry, he's OK.

Directions: Follow the prompts to mark the poem and answer the questions below. Note: To make things simple, we refer to the speaker of this poem as "he," but the speaker could be a male or a female.

1. This whole poem is a long conditional statement—which just means that the speaker is saying that *if* a particular thing happens or is true, *then* another thing will happen or be true.

Here are two examples of conditional statements:

If it rains, the picnic will be postponed.

If Aaron is serious about learning to skydive, he's even more daring than I thought.

A. Circle the word "if" at the beginning of the poem.

B. Draw a bracket around the lines where the speaker lays out the condition—where he states something that means, "if this happens."

C. Draw a second bracket around the lines where the speaker states the consequence—where he states something that means, "then this is true."

2. In the first two lines of the poem, the speaker begins a thought. Which of the following best summarizes this beginning of that thought?

A If boys are wise or unwise . . .

B If a boy is wise he will . . .

C If there was ever a boy who . . .

D Once there live a boy who . . .

3. Consider line 2: "Wise or otherwise, good or bad."

Why do you think the poet chose to use the word *otherwise* instead of another word, like *foolish* or *unwise*? (Hint: Think about the way the line *sounds* and the way this wording affects the tone.)

4. Every word in a poem is important. But there's an *extra* important word in line 3—a word that, if you were to take it out, would change the meaning of the whole poem.

A. Circle that word. (Hint: Look at line 12.)

B. Briefly explain why you chose the word you circled.

5. In lines 3-9, the speaker imagines a boy looking at birds and then not doing what?

A chasing the birds off of fences and tree stumps

B flapping his arms like a bird and leaping off something in an attempt to fly

C watching birds from a sailboat

D accepting that people can't fly like birds

6. In line 12, the poet writes, "Who didn't try that as often as once."

A. What's another way the poet could have said "as often as once"?

7. In line 13, the speaker says, "All I can say is, that's a sign." What does "that's" refer to?

- Ⓐ a boy being a dunce
- Ⓑ the reader knowing a boy from the country
- Ⓒ a boy having once flapped his arms like a bird, wishing he could fly
- Ⓓ a boy never having tried to fly and never wondering why humans can't fly

8. In one sentence, summarize what the speaker says in this poem.

9. Why do you think the speaker says that a boy who never looked at birds and tried to fly could never be his hero? Based on this statement, what qualities do you think the speaker admires in a person?

10. John Townsend Trowbridge wrote this poem more than 35 years *before* the Wright brothers made their first successful flight at Kitty Hawk. Can you draw any conclusions from this poem about whether Trowbridge believed human flight would ever be possible?
