Ode On A Grecian Urn
by John Keats

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:

What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;

More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?

What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.
Ode On A Grecian Urn

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
1. What is a question the speaker asks in the first stanza?
   A. Are heard or unheard melodies sweeter?
   B. What men or gods are these?
   C. Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
   D. To what green altar, O mysterious priest, / Lead'st thou that heifer?

2. Whom or what is the speaker addressing in the first stanza?
   A. a flower
   B. a god
   C. a man
   D. an urn

3. Read these lines from the poem.

"Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?"

What can you infer from "What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?" (line 10)?
   A. There are pipes depicted on the urn.
   B. The speaker knows how to play pipes and timbrels.
   C. Pipes have a sweeter sound than timbrels.
   D. Timbrels have a sweeter sound than pipes.
4. Read the second and third stanzas of the poem.

Why can the boughs of the trees never shed their leaves?

A. because they are an illustration and will never change
B. because they are in a climate that is warm all year
C. because the trees produce a sap that causes the leaves to stick to the boughs
D. because the "Bold Lover" (line 17) takes such good care of them

5. What is a theme of this poem?

A. Nature is more important than art.
B. Art lasts longer than life.
C. Telling the truth is more important than being beautiful.
D. If you are attractive, people will believe what you say.

6. Read these lines from the poem.

"Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue."

Why might the poet have repeated the word "happy" so often in this stanza?

A. to make readers question whether people in love are really happy
B. to call attention to a similarity between a "burning forehead" and a "parching tongue" (line 30)
C. to suggest that the happiness being described will soon come to an end
D. to emphasize that the happiness being described is never-ending
7. Read these lines from the poem.

"Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return."

Whom or what does the word "these" in line 31 refer to?

A. the "garlands" in line 34  
B. the "folk" in line 37  
C. the "town" in line 38  
D. the "streets" in line 38

8. Read these lines from the poem.

"Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!"

The "Bold Lover" is close to kissing a female who is "fair," or beautiful. How long will she be fair?

9. What does the urn "say" in lines 49 and 50?

10. In line 49 the claim is made that "[b]eauty is truth."

Explain whether the rest of the poem supports or contradicts this claim.

Support your answer with evidence from the text.
1. What is a question the speaker asks in the first stanza?
   A. Are heard or unheard melodies sweeter?
   B. What men or gods are these?
   C. Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
   D. To what green altar, O mysterious priest, / Lead'st thou that heifer?

2. Whom or what is the speaker addressing in the first stanza?
   A. a flower
   B. a god
   C. a man
   D. an urn

3. Read these lines from the poem.

   "Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
   Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
   Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
   A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
   What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
   Of deities or mortals, or of both,
   In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
   What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
   What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
   What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?"

What can you infer from "What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?" (line 10)?

   A. There are pipes depicted on the urn.
   B. The speaker knows how to play pipes and timbrels.
   C. Pipes have a sweeter sound than timbrels.
   D. Timbrels have a sweeter sound than pipes.
4. Read the second and third stanzas of the poem.

Why can the boughs of the trees never shed their leaves?

A. because they are an illustration and will never change
B. because they are in a climate that is warm all year
C. because the trees produce a sap that causes the leaves to stick to the boughs
D. because the "Bold Lover" (line 17) takes such good care of them

5. What is a theme of this poem?

A. Nature is more important than art.
B. Art lasts longer than life.
C. Telling the truth is more important than being beautiful.
D. If you are attractive, people will believe what you say.

6. Read these lines from the poem.

"Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue."

Why might the poet have repeated the word "happy" so often in this stanza?

A. to make readers question whether people in love are really happy
B. to call attention to a similarity between a "burning forehead" and a "parching tongue" (line 30)
C. to suggest that the happiness being described will soon come to an end
D. to emphasize that the happiness being described is never-ending
7. Read these lines from the poem.

"Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return."

Whom or what does the word "these" in line 31 refer to?

A. the "garlands" in line 34  
B. the "folk" in line 37  
C. the "town" in line 38  
D. the "streets" in line 38

8. Read these lines from the poem.

"Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!"

The "Bold Lover" is close to kissing a female who is "fair," or beautiful. How long will she be fair?

She will be fair forever.

9. What does the urn "say" in lines 49 and 50?

It says, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,-that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

10. In line 49 the claim is made that "[b]eauty is truth."
Explain whether the rest of the poem supports or contradicts this claim.

Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Students may take either position. Whichever they choose, they should support their answer with evidence from the poem. For example: The rest of the poem contradicts the claim that "[b]eauty is truth." It actually suggests that beauty and truth are at odds. Consider the example of the female pursued by the "Bold Lover" in the second stanza. She will always be "fair," or beautiful. That is because she is a fabrication, an illustration on an urn. In other words, she is imaginary, not true. In reality, beauty fades. Someone who is beautiful forever exists outside reality. He or she is immune to the truth of human existence and remains even "[w]hen old age shall this generation waste" (line 46). This tension between truth and beauty indicates they are not the same.