

Ozymandias 2

Shelley's poem, Ozymandias, is well known to English teachers. Less well-known is Horace Smith's sonnet on the same subject:

IN Egypt's sandy silence, all alone,
Stands a gigantic Leg, which far off throws
The only shadow that the Desert knows:—
"I am great OZYMANDIAS," saith the stone,
"The King of Kings; this mighty City shows
The wonders of my hand."— The City's gone,—
Nought but the Leg remaining to disclose
The site of this forgotten Babylon.
We wonder,—and some Hunter may express
Wonder like ours, when thro' the wilderness
Where London stood, holding the Wolf in chace,
He meets some fragment huge, and stops to guess
What powerful but unrecorded race
Once dwelt in that annihilated place.

The two poets wrote, it seems, in a kind of friendly competition. However, few people now remember Smith's effort. It might make a useful exercise for students to compare the two poems and to draw out similarities and differences. Is it possible to see where one is superior to the other? (If students do not know the poem, do not give the writers' names and see which they prefer and, of course, why.)

Display the two poems side by side with space for students to make annotations. Then project them onto a whiteboard or use a visualiser and collect and discuss the observations students have made.