

John Milton
On his blindness
Questions to challenge you!

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1. What is the theme of the Octave? What is the theme of the Sestet? (4)
2. How does the sestet differ remarkably from the octave? (Hint: you could count how many times the poet uses the personal pronoun "I" or "my" or "me" in each.) (6)
3. Milton must have known that his life was actually more than half-spent. What then does he mean when he says that he has become blind "e're half my days"? (4)
4. It has been said that Milton over-exaggerates his blindness.
 - Is this true? Substantiate your answer with clear references to the text. (6)
5. Milton -- a dyed-in-the-wool Puritan -- sees the world as being an essentially evil place.
 - Explain how he portrays this notion in his choice of words, "in this dark world and wide". (4)
6. Comment on the image which the poet portrays in the words, "though my Soul more bent to serve . . . my maker." (6)
7. Is Milton arguing with God in the Octave? (4)
8. Why is it that "Patience" answers the poet in the Sestet, and not God himself? (4)
9. "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts."
 - The answer that Patience gives is actually typical of a contemporary Puritan or Calvinist attitude to religion. Can you explain why this is so? (4)
10. "Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o're Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and waite."
 - It would appear that Milton is using a shipping image here, an image remembered from his youth when he would have observed his father at work as a shipping magnate. Can you explain how this is so? (4)
11. Milton uses two stories from the New Testament to substantiate both his fears and his relief. The first, found in the Octave, causes him anguish while the second, found in the Sestet, leads to his profound sense of comfort.
 - Can you find these two stories? (4)
 - Is Milton's presentation of these stories accurate? (4)
12. What words BEST describe the tone of this sonnet? (2)

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