**Starlings in Winter**

**Mary Oliver**

Chunky and noisy,

but with stars in their black feathers,

they spring from the telephone wire

and instantly

**5** they are acrobats

in the freezing wind.

And now, in the theater of air,

they swing over buildings,

dipping and rising;

**10** they float like one stippled\* star

that opens,

becomes for a moment fragmented,

then closes again;

and you watch

**15** and you try

but you simply can't imagine

how they do it

with no articulated instruction, no pause,

only the silent confirmation

**20** that they are this notable thing,

this wheel of many parts, that can rise and spin

over and over again,

full of gorgeous life.

Ah, world, what lessons you prepare for us,

**25** even in the leafless winter,

even in the ashy city.

I am thinking now

of grief, and of getting past it;

I feel my boots

**30** trying to leave the ground,

I feel my heart

pumping hard. I want

to think again of dangerous and noble things.

I want to be light and frolicsome.

**35** I want to be improbable beautiful and afraid of nothing,

as though I had wings.

\*dotted

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1. The figurative language in line 5 suggests that the starlings—

1. fly in a straight line
2. take to the air in pairs

c. show off their colored feathers

d. move gracefully through the air

2. The repetition in lines 14-16—

1. emphasizes how people are connected to the starlings
2. illustrates the appearance of the starlings' flight formations
3. explains the speaker's opinion that nature is always changing
4. shows the speaker's belief that it is hard to figure out the starlings' movements

3. The phrase “theater of air” in line 7 means—

1. private viewing
2. darkness is coming
3. people are watching
4. performance in the sky

4. The speaker might want to have wings to—

1. be colorful.
2. be a risk-taker.
3. escape the winter.
4. look more lovely.

5. Explain how the author’s words and ideas create changes in mood. Use information from the poem to explain your ideas.

6. Why might the author use the figurative language in line 10?

1. to visualize the night sky
2. to help the reader see the birds moving
3. to explain the sounds the birds are making
4. to describe the birds on the telephone wire

7. The phrase, “wheel of many parts,” adds to the poem by—

1. describing birds’ unique features.
2. explaining how starlings are like cars.
3. showing how birds work together as one.

d. emphasizing the circular motion of birds.

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**The Secret Heart**

**Robert Peter Tristram Coffin**

Across the years he could recall  
His father one way best of all.

In the stillest hour of night  
The boy awakened to a light.

Half in dreams, he was his sire  
With his great hands full of fire.

The man had struck a match to see  
If his son slept peacefully.

He held his palms each side the spark  
His love had kindled in the dark.

His two hands were curved apart  
In the semblance of a heart.

He wore, it seemed to his small son,  
A bare heart on his hidden one,

A heart that gave out such a glow  
No son awake could bare to know.

It showed a look upon a face  
Too tender for the day to trace.

One instant, it lit all about,  
And then the secret heart went out.

But shone long enough for one  
To know that hands held up the sun.

8. The author might have chosen to use a rhyme scheme in order to emphasize—

1. the idea of family.
2. the dad’s thoughts.
3. changes in the action.

d. key words about that night.

9. What do the father’s hands holding the match symbolize for the son? Use information from the poem to explain your ideas.

10. The author used alliteration in line 18 in order to emphasize—

1. the son’s heart.
2. the glow of the fire.
3. the father’s emotion.
4. the dark of the night.

11. The author’s word choices create a mood that is—

1. warm.
2. playful.
3. confining.
4. sympathetic.

### The Last Shot

**Anonymous**

The crowd was as tense as a mouse meeting fear;  
Their backs are straighter than rulers.  
Time is like the speed of light.  
Everybody’s eyes are as large as saucers.  
I am always given the last shot;  
My aim is as certain as the rising sun.

12. The author included, “Their backs are straighter than rulers” in the second line to—

1. see the crowd.
2. feel their pain.
3. recall the school gym.
4. tell the game’s length.

13. Why would the audience have eyes “as large as saucers”?

1. They were really engaged.
2. They needed to see the game.
3. The crowd was filling up with tears.
4. They wanted the teams to see their concern.

14. What will most likely happen next?

1. The speaker scores points.
2. The referee will miss the call.
3. A teammate will make the shot.
4. The crowd will distract the team.