

Comprehension Questions

NB: Some questions may have several possible correct responses; a sample is given.

1. Whose son is Pyrrhus, also called Neoptolemus? Whose son is Polites? **Pyrrhus is Achilles' son; Polites is Priam's son.**
2. What does Pyrrhus do to Polites in lines 526-32? **Pyrrhus kills Polites.**
3. How does line 531 show Pyrrhus as especially cruel? **He kills Polites in front of his father and mother, Priam and Hecuba.**
4. When Aeneas first appears in the poem in Book 1, he exclaims, "*o terque quaterque beati, / quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis / contigit oppetere!*" How does the action of lines 529-43 correspond to Aeneas' prayer in Book 1—or does it? **Aeneas' first words in the poem are, "Oh three and four times blessed [are you] to whom it befell to die before the faces of your fathers at the foot of the lofty walls of Troy." In lines 529-43, Vergil details the cruel death of Priam, who has just witnessed his own son's slaughter. It would not appear that Priam or Polites are "blessed."**
5. In lines 535-43, Priam compares Pyrrhus to his father Achilles. Whom does Priam find more honorable? Why? **Priam finds Achilles more honorable because he understood how to treat a suppliant.**
6. How do lines 544-46 reinforce the image of Priam seen in lines 507-11? **Priam is too old to be able to resist Pyrrhus' attack; earlier he was also described as so old that his shoulders trembled as he tried to put on his long unused armor.**
7. What is Pyrrhus' attitude as he speaks to Priam in lines 547-50? **Pyrrhus is arrogant and heartless.**
8. What does Aeneas say Priam was witnessing as he died (lines 554-57)? **Priam witnessed the destruction of Troy as it burned and fell.**
9. What prompts Aeneas to think of his own father? **As Aeneas watches Priam die, he thinks of his own father, who is the same age as Priam.**

Short Answer Questions

Indicate True or False.

1. **T** The phrase *unus natorum* (line 527) is in apposition to Polites.
2. **F** In line 529, *illum* refers to Pyrrhus.
3. **T** *hasta* in line 530 is ablative of means/instrument.
4. **T** In line 532, *ac* connects *concidit* and *fudit*.
5. **F** There are two elisions in line 533.
6. **F** *voci* (line 534) is dative because of *abstulit*.

7. F In line 537, *persolvant* is subjunctive in a future-less-vivid (should/would) condition.
8. T *coram* (line 538) is an adverb.
9. F *funere* in line 539 is an infinitive.
10. T *satum [esse]* (line 540) has *te* as its subject.
11. T In line 542, *-que* connects *erubuit* and *reddidit*.
12. F The antecedent of *quod* (line 545) is *ictu*.
13. T The translation of *nequiquam* in line 546 is "uselessly."
14. F In line 547, *referes* is present subjunctive.
15. T *illi* (line 548) is an indirect object.
16. T In line 549, *memento* is an imperative.
17. T *morere* (line 550) is an imperative.
18. F The translation of *lapsantem sanguine nati* in line 551 is "the son slipping in blood."
19. F In line 553, *lateri* and *capulo* are in the same case.
20. T *exitus* (line 554) is the subject of *tulit*.
21. F In line 555, *videntem* modifies *Troiam*.
22. F *exitus* (line 554) is in apposition to *illum* (line 554).
23. F In line 559, *me* is ablative.
24. F *imago* in line 560 is best translated as "ghost."
25. F *exhalantem* (line 562) modifies *vitam*.
26. T *casus* is nominative in line 563.
27. T In line 564, *sit* is subjunctive in an indirect question.
28. T *me circum* (line 564) is an example of anastrophe.
29. F *saltu* (line 565) is a supine.
30. F *misere* in line 566 is an adverb.

Translation *Suggested time: 20 minutes*

Translate the following passage as literally as possible.

- ... Hoc dicens altaria ad ipsa trementem
 traxit et in multo lapsantem sanguine nati,
 implicuitque comam laeva, dextraque coruscum
 extulit ac lateri capulo tenus abdidit ensem.
 5 Haec finis Priami fatorum, hic exitus illum
 sorte tulit Troiam incensam et prolapsa videntem
 Pergama, tot quondam populis terrisque superbum
 regnatorem Asiae.

Aeneid II, 550-557

Literal Translation

Saying this, he drew the trembling man to the altars themselves, [and] slipping in the abundant blood of [his] son, and he entwined [Priam's] hair in [his] left hand, and with [his] right he took out [his] flashing sword and buried it up to the hilt in [Priam's] side. This [was] the end of the fates of Priam, this destruction [over]took him as he saw Troy burned and Pergamum fallen, [him] once the ruler of Asia, proud with so many peoples and lands.

The sections into which a passage is divided are flexible, as are the possible acceptable meanings for any given word. Teachers may prefer a different scheme of "chunking" and range of meanings; what is given below is just one option. Since students must prove to the reader that they understand the grammar of the passage, loose translations are not acceptable, and students should clearly demonstrate the syntactical information provided in parentheses in the column below with the English range of meanings.

18 chunks. 9 points, ½ point each. Round up to the nearest whole point.

Possible range of meanings:

<i>hoc dicens</i>	saying/speaking this (<i>hoc</i> is object of <i>dicens</i>)
<i>altaria ad ipsa</i>	to/toward the altars themselves
<i>trementem traxit</i>	he dragged/drew [him/that one] trembling/shaking/quivering (<i>trementem</i> modifies understood object of <i>traxit</i>)
<i>in multo ... sanguine nati</i>	in the much blood of [his] son
<i>et ... lapsantem</i>	and slipping/stumbling/falling (<i>lapsantem</i> modifies understood object of <i>traxit</i>)
<i>implicuitque comam</i>	and he entwined [his] hair/locks
<i>laeva</i>	with his left [hand] (ablative)
<i>dextra</i>	with his [right] hand (ablative)
<i>-que coruscum extulit ... ensem</i>	and he drew/lifted/raised [his] flashing/bright/waving sword
<i>ac lateri ... abdidit</i>	and he hid/buried [it] in [his] side/flank (<i>lateri</i> dative)
<i>capulo tenus</i>	up to/as far as the hilt/handle/head
<i>haec finis Priami fatorum</i>	this was the end of the fates of Priam
<i>hic exitus illum ... tulit</i>	this death/exit bore/took away/carried that one/him
<i>sorte</i>	by lot/fate/destiny

<i>Troiam incensam . . . videntem</i>	[him] seeing Troy [having been] burnt/enflamed/burned (<i>Troiam</i> object of <i>videntem</i> , which modifies <i>illum</i>)
<i>et prolapsa . . . Pergama</i>	and Troy/Pergama/the citadel of Troy [having] fallen/perished (<i>Pergama</i> object of <i>videntem</i>)
<i>tot . . . populis terrisque superbum</i>	[a ruler] proud/haughty with so many peoples/nations and lands (<i>superbum</i> modifies <i>regnatorem</i>)
<i>quondam . . . regnatorem Asiae</i>	once the ruler/sovereign/lord of Asia

Translation and Analysis Questions

Translate the Latin used in the question and then answer the question.

1. What theme is Vergil emphasizing by using the phrases *unus natorum* (line 527), *ora parentum* (line 531), *nati letum* (line 538), *satum* (line 540), *genitori* (line 548), *sanguine nati* (line 551) and *genitoris imago* (line 560)?

With the phrases "one of his sons," "the faces of [his] parents," "the death of [his] son," "having been begotten," "father," "the blood of [his] son" and "image of [his] father," Vergil is emphasizing the importance of descendants and ancestry, both on the personal level, including the personal grief that war causes for parents and children, and on the national level, since a nation cannot exist without the continuation of its children.

2. When Vergil writes *quamquam in media iam morte tenetur* (line 533), to whose death is he referring? How might he mean this phrase at two levels?

Priam, "although he is now held in the middle of death," is literally in the middle of the deaths around him, including his son's, but he is also in the middle of his own impending death.

3. Priam poses the question *si qua est caelo pietas quae talia curet* (line 536). From what you have read of the poem so far, do you think this is the case or not? Why?

With his words, "If there is any sense of duty in heaven which cares for such [matters]," Priam questions the assumption that the divinities would care. Student responses can take either side but need to be substantiated with reference to the context. While student responses to "why or why not" are open-ended, they should include reasons based on the context.

4. In Lines 541–43, Priam describes his encounter with Achilles after the death of Hector by saying *sed iura fidemque/ supplicis erubuit corpusque exsanguis sepulchro/ reddidit Hectoreum meque in mea regna remisit*. How does this recall lines 483–84 from Book I in which Achilles' treatment of Hector's corpse is described as *ter circum Iliacos raptaverat Hectora muros/ exanimumque auro corpus vendebat Achilles*? How does the tone in each of these two passages differ?

Priam tries to chastise Pyrrhus by contrasting his behavior with his father's. He says, "But he revered the laws and trust of a suppliant and he returned Hector's lifeless body and sent me back into my kingdom." However, in Book I, Achilles is described: "Achilles thrice had dragged Hector around the Trojan walls and was selling the lifeless body for gold." In the description in Book II, Achilles is portrayed as having sympathy for a father's plight, whereas in the description from Book I he appears more savage and bloodthirsty. The contrast of the savage and the compassionate Achilles underscores the brutality of Achilles' son's lack of compassion and savage response to Priam's plea.

5. What characteristic of Neoptolemus/Pyrrihus is highlighted by the use of the words *tremementem* (line 550) and *lapsantem sanguine nati* (line 551)?

When Priam is described as “trembling” and “slipping in the blood of his son,” Neoptolemus’ cruelty is all the more vivid.

6. As Priam dies, what else is Vergil emphasizing with the phrases *Troiam incensam* (line 555) and *prolapsa Pergama* (lines 555-56)? How might the phrases *ingens truncus* (line 557), *avulsum caput* (line 558) and *sine nomine corpus* (line 558) be read in two different ways?

Vergil links Priam’s death with the “death” of Troy by describing Priam as seeing “Troy burned” and “Pergamum fallen” as he dies. That Priam becomes a “huge trunk” with his “head ripped off” and a “body without a name” is a reflection of what happens to the city of Troy itself.

7. A standard feature of epic poetry is a description of a hero’s *aristeia*, his “display of glory on the battlefield,” and Vergil does in fact include several passages of this sort later in the poem. How do lines 560-63, *subiit cari genitoris imago, / ut regem aequaeuum crudeli vulnere vidit vitam exhalantem, subiit deserta Creusa / et direpta domus et parvi casus Iuli*, focus the reader’s attention on a contrasting vision of war?

Aeneas recalls, “The image of my dear father came [to mind] as I saw the king of the same age breathing out his life, deserted Creusa came [to mind] and so did the ravaged house and the misfortune of little Iulus.” This personal account of the devastation of war contrasts deeply with the celebration of heroism depicted in an account of an *aristeia*.

8. How do lines 565-66, *deseruere omnes defessi, et corpora saltu / ad terram misere aut ignibus aegra dedere*, show yet another contrast with the concept of *aristeia*?

“All the weary [men] departed and sent their bodies to the ground with a leap or gave them, weary, to the fires.” Soldiers who are so exhausted and weary that they kill themselves contrast greatly with those whose exploits are celebrated in epic.

Essay Suggested time: 20 minutes

One of Vergil’s themes in the *Aeneid* is the inversion of the natural order of things by war, i.e., children die before their parents. How does this passage emphasize this theme? Present your response in a well-organized essay.

Support your assertions with references drawn from throughout the passage. All Latin words must be copied or their line numbers provided, AND they must be translated or paraphrased closely enough so that it is clear you understand the Latin. It is your responsibility to convince your reader that you are basing your conclusions on the Latin text and not merely on a general recollection of the passage. Direct your answer to the question; do not merely summarize the passage. Please write your essay on a separate piece of paper.

Students will respond to essay topics in various ways, and different essays, with quite different approaches, may be of equal quality. The following are some possible points students may make; it is not a sample essay.

Scansion

Scan the following lines.

- - - - - U U - - - U U - U U - X
 Ut tand(em) ant(e) oculos evasit et ora parentum,

- U U - - - - - - - - U U - X
 concidit ac multo vitam cum sanguine fudit.

- U - - - - - U U - - - U U - X
 Hic Priamus, quamqu(am) in media iam morte tenetur,

- U U - U U - - - - - U U - X
 non tamen abstinuit nec voc(i) iraeque pepercit:

(lines 531-34)