Linda Pastan (b. 1932) is an American poet of Jewish background and was Poet Laureate of Maryland from 1991-1995. She is known for writing short, relatable poems that address common experiences people share throughout their lives. The following poem is from her collection in *Poetry Magazine* and meditates on the nature of dreams. As you read, take notes on the figurative language the poet uses to describes dreams.

**Dreams**

By Linda Pastan

1979

Dreams are the only afterlife we know; the place where the children we were rock in the arms of the children we have become.

They are as many as leaves in their migrations, as birds whose deaths we learn of by the single feather left behind: a clue, a particle of sleep caught in the eye. They are as irretrievable as sand when the sea creeps up its long knife glittering in its teeth to claim its patrimony.¹

Sometimes my father in knickers and cap waits on that shore the dream of him a wound not even morning can heal.

The dog's legs pump in his sleep; your closed eyelids flicker as the reel unwinds: archer and bull's eye.

¹. *Patrimony (noun)*: property inherited from one's father or male ancestor
Last night I dreamed a lover in my arms
and woke innocent.
The sky was starry to the very rind,
his smile still burning there
[35] like the tail of a comet
that has just blazed by.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which TWO of the following statements best describe the themes of the poem? [RL.2]
   A. Life is fleeting and so we must strive to live to the fullest.
   B. Our dreams are filled with images of what we have desired and lost.
   C. Dreams are satisfying opportunities to remember the past.
   D. Dreams motivate us to accomplish new things and to have hope for the future.
   E. People seek comfort in dreams and in the past when experiencing grief and loneliness.
   F. Through dreams we experience small but poignant reminders of our lives.

2. PART B: Which TWO of the following quotes best support the answers to Part A? [RL.2]
   A. “the place where the children / we were / rock in the arms of the children / we have become.” (Lines 3-6)
   B. “in their migrations, / as birds whose deaths we learn of / by the single feather” (Lines 8-10)
   C. “left behind: a clue, / a particle of sleep / caught in the eye.” (Lines 11-12)
   D. “The dog’s legs pump / in his sleep;” (Lines 25-26)
   E. “Last night I dreamed a lover in my arms / and woke innocent.” (Lines 31-32)
   F. “The sky was starry to the very rind,” (Line 33)

3. PART A: How does the word choice in stanza 3 develop the tone of the poem? [RL.4]
   A. It creates a peaceful, relaxed tone as the speaker reflects on the sand.
   B. It emphasizes the speaker’s sentimental feelings towards her dreams.
   C. It introduces an ominous tone that accentuates how dreams create anguish.
   D. It extends the gloomy, depressed tone developed in stanza 2.

4. PART B: Which detail from the poem best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
   A. “caught in the eye.” (Line 13)
   B. “They are as irretrievable as sand” (Line 14)
   C. “when the sea creeps up / its long knife glittering” (Lines 15-16)
   D. “in its teeth / to claim its patrimony.” (Lines 17-18)

5. How does stanza 4 contribute to the development of the poem’s meaning? [RL.5]
   A. It conveys how dreams can be painful because they emphasize absence.
   B. It emphasizes that dreams send us messages from the departed.
   C. It illustrates the power of dreams to heal the pains of the past.
   D. It demonstrates the importance of parents in comforting children after nightmares.
6. The poet uses the images of migrations, sand, and the tail of a comet to describe dreams. How does word choice impact the tone of the poem? Support your answer by citing multiple examples of word choice.
Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. What do you feel after you wake up from a dream? How is it similar or different from the feelings that the speaker of “Dreams” may experience?

2. In your opinion, what is the relationship between our dreams and our lives? How did reading this poem change your opinion or understanding of dreams?

3. In the context of this poem, what does it mean to feel alone? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

4. How might the speaker’s age influence her perspective and reflections on dreams in this poem?