**Excerpt from *Letters to a Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke**

**Childhood**

It would be good to give much thought, before
you try to find words for something so lost,
for those long childhood afternoons you knew
that vanished so completely -and why?

We're still reminded-: sometimes by a rain, 5
but we can no longer say what it means;
life was never again so filled with meeting,
with reunion and with passing on

as back then, when nothing happened to us
except what happens to things and creatures: 10
we lived their world as something human,
and became filled to the brim with figures.

And became as lonely as a shepherd
and as overburdened by vast distances,
and summoned and stirred as from far away, 15
and slowly, like a long new thread,
introduced into that picture-sequence
where now having to go on bewilders us.

Rainer Maria Rilke 1902 (age 27)

Answer the following questions about the poem above on a separate sheet of paper:

1. In “Childhood,” what words and phrases does the speaker use to describe childhood? What do these words and phrases suggest about this time of life?
2. Do you think the speaker had a positive childhood experience or a negative one? How do you know?
3. What does the speaker mean when he says that “…back then, when nothing happened to us/except what happens to things and creatures:/we lived their world as something human..”?
4. What words show that the speaker’s movement into adulthood is not a positive experience?
5. What is the overall tone of this poem?
6. Predict what advice the speaker would give to someone younger than himself about growing up.