Live Worksheet: *"Introduction to Poetry"* by Billy Collins

📖 Instructions:

1. Read the poem carefully.
2. Answer the multiple-choice questions connected to each stanza.
3. Complete the reflection at the end in full paragraphs.

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1. First Stanza

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

Q1. What is the speaker suggesting students should do with a poem?
a) Memorize it word for word
b) Examine it carefully and attentively, like a slide under light
c) Translate it into another language
d) Read it quickly and move on

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2. Second Stanza

or press an ear against its hive.

Q2. What feeling or action is this metaphor trying to convey?
a) Listening closely to find subtle meanings and "buzzes" inside the poem
b) Being afraid of bees and noise
c) Destroying the poem's structure
d) Ignoring outside distractions while reading

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3. Third and Fourth Stanza

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

Q3. Why does the poet describe putting a mouse into a poem?
a) To test if the poem is safe

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b) To show that poems should be solved like puzzles, by exploration
c) To scare the reader
d) To teach biology using poetry

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4. Fifth Stanza

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

Q4. This image most strongly suggests:
a) Turning off the poem
b) Looking for the deeper meaning slowly, patiently
c) Finding a way to escape the poem
d) Repairing the room's electricity

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5. Sixth Stanza

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

Q5. The speaker is encouraging students to:
a) Have fun and enjoy the poem, not always dive too deep
b) Swim underwater to understand it
c) Leave the poem and go to the shore
d) Look for the author's biography before reading

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6. Seventh & Eighth Stanza

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.
They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

Q6. What criticism is the speaker making here?
a) Students are too gentle with poems
b) Students are too focused on having fun
c) Students treat poems like suspects, trying to force one specific meaning out
d) The poem is dangerous and needs to be controlled

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✍️ Final Reflection: Written Response (15–20 minutes)

Write a short essay (200–300 words) responding to the following prompt:

Billy Collins describes two very different ways of reading poetry—his playful, curious approach and the forceful, analytical approach he criticizes.

Think about your own experience with poetry or other types of reading.

- How have you approached poetry in the past?
- Do you relate more to the speaker or the students? Why?
- What did this poem teach you about how to experience literature?
- How might you read differently in the future based on this poem?

Use examples from the poem and your own experience. Be honest and thoughtful.

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