Analyzing “A Minor Bird”

Directions: Below is Robert Frost’s poem “A Minor Bird,” which appears on page 7 of this issue of Scope. Use the poem to help you answer the questions below and on the next pages.

A Minor Bird
By Robert Frost

I have wished a bird would fly away,
And not sing by my house all day;

Have clapped my hands at him from the door
When it seemed as if I could bear no more.

The fault must partly have been in me.
The bird was not to blame for his key.

And of course there must be something wrong
In wanting to silence any song.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Which of the following best describes the speaker’s reaction to the bird that sings outside his house?
   A) He is irritated by the bird’s singing.
   B) He finds the bird’s singing soothing.
   C) The bird’s singing fills him with joy.
   D) He is so used to the bird’s singing that he hardly notices it.

2. Why does the speaker clap his hands at the bird (line 3)?
   A) to applaud the bird’s singing
   B) to scare it away
   C) to warn it that there is a cat nearby
   D) to make it sing something else

3. Which of the following sentences uses *bear* in the same way that it is used in line 4?
   A) I’m not sure this little chair can *bear* my weight.
   B) That tree does not *bear* fruit.
   C) We saw a *bear* in the woods.
   D) I cannot *bear* another day in this horrible place!

4. Which of the following best describes how the speaker feels about having shooed away the singing bird?
   A) victorious
   B) unconcerned
   C) regretful
   D) relieved
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Short-Answer Questions

5. In line 5, the speaker says, “The fault must partly have been in me.” What does he mean?

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6. Minor means “lesser in size, importance, or value.” Minor is also a musical term; many people think that music in a minor key sounds sad or serious. Thinking about these definitions of minor, what are some possible meanings of the poem’s title? In what way or ways is the bird in the poem minor?

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7. What emotions or qualities do people usually associate with birds singing?

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8a. Consider the last two lines of the poem: “And of course there must be something wrong/In wanting to silence any song.” How does the word any affect the meaning of this line? (Think about how the meaning of the lines would have been different if Frost had written “a bird’s song” instead of “any song.”)

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b. What bigger question than “How could I want to silence a bird?” is the speaker asking? (Consider the bigger or more symbolic meaning of song.)

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