

The Idler

Alice Dunbar-Nelson

How does the final question destabilize the poem’s apparent criticism of the idler?

TOTAL TIME	TUMBLETA PASSAGE LOCATION
30 minutes	Poem - complete poem

TEACHER SETUP

Open the work in the Enhanced Reader and cue the span using the START and END anchors below.

START	An idle lingerer on the wayside’s road,
END	When you, like him, into infinitude are hurled?
PASSAGE ID	sec-dunbar-idler-01

THE MOVE

Analyze how a closing turn forces readers to reconsider an earlier judgment.

WHY THIS PASSAGE

Most of the poem invites pity or scorn for a man without ambition. The ending asks whether relentless striving produces a better final outcome, unsettling the easy judgment.

MARK

Underline language that makes the idler seem pitiable. Circle language showing his contentment. Box the final comparison between his life and the reader’s striving.

NOTICE

- What judgment does the opening encourage?
- What evidence complicates that judgment before the end?
- How does the final question change the poem’s target?

THINK

Answer provisionally: How does the final question destabilize the poem's apparent criticism of the idler? Choose the strongest interpretation you can defend from this passage alone.

WRITE

Write a short evidence-based response. Use at least two details from the assigned passage and explain how they support your interpretation.

CLOSE

Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and say why.

STRONG ANSWER

The poem begins by making the idler look deficient, then turns its scrutiny onto the ambitious observer. The closing question converts pity into uncertainty about what counts as a life well spent.

EVIDENCE

Use one early judgment and the final reversal.

WATCH FOR

Do not claim the poem simply celebrates laziness. Explain the destabilizing turn.

SOLO

Read independently.

SUPPORTED

Narration + highlighting.

LISTENING

Listen; same evidence task.

STUDENT PAGE · GRADE 12 · LESSON 353

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WORK	The Idler
TUMBLETA PASSAGE LOCATION	Poem - complete poem
PASSAGE ID	sec-dunbar-idler-01

Your teacher will open or cue the work in the Enhanced Reader. Use the location and verbatim anchors below to confirm the assigned span.

START

An idle lingerer on the wayside's road,

END

When you, like him, into infinitude are hurled?

READ / LISTEN TO THE ASSIGNED PASSAGE SOLO: read independently. SUPPORTED: use narration and highlighting. LISTENING: listen to the assigned passage. The question and evidence task stay the same.

1. MARK Underline language that makes the idler seem pitiable. Circle language showing his contentment. Box the final comparison between his life and the reader's striving.
2. NOTICE What judgment does the opening encourage? What evidence complicates that judgment before the end? How does the final question change the poem's target?
3. THINK Answer provisionally: How does the final question destabilize the poem's apparent criticism of the idler?
4. WRITE Write a short response using at least two pieces of evidence from this passage.
5. CLOSE Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and say why.