

## Ode to Fireworks

In autumn my mother drove us to the edge of the field  
where the fair was set up year after year:  
the carousel, the bumper cars, the long, low sheds  
filled with prizewinning animals.

- 5 We—my sister, my cousin, and I—were ready for bed,  
already in our pajamas. This was a treat we waited  
all year for. We waited in the darkness  
for the first low, dull *thwumps*, like someone  
beating an old, filthy rug hung on a wash line.
- 10 Then we counted the seconds between the lightning  
and thunder, as we also used to do, until the sky  
lit up: red, blue, green, gold. In my mind’s eye  
I can still see the straggly, ancient oak whose branches  
reached up past the exhibition halls, silhouetted
- 15 against the spectrum of stars that cascaded behind it.

- It was one thing to look up into the sky  
and imagine yourself in it or to make out pictures  
among the clouds, which my sister liked to do.  
No, I would tell her, that cloud
- 20 does *not* look like an elephant, a hat, an umbrella.  
But it was another thing to see  
the sky at night written upon  
with those jewels. (We lived in the country:  
night was *night*.) All around us, crickets
- 25 stridulated in the stubble of what had been  
somebody’s cornfield, their song rising and falling.  
You could smell winter on the air’s edge.

- Now, in the city, when the sky dips into shadow  
at New Year’s or on the Fourth of July, I find myself
- 30 craning my neck upward at odd moments.  
The city sky is always lit up. This is where we live now,  
and it is how we live now, awash in light  
of every hue. Everything is a constant celebration:  
picking up washing at the cleaner’s or stopping by
- 35 the corner market for a loaf of heavy bread.  
And the music around me is the music of people,  
their voices rising and falling in a hundred languages.  
But beneath the yellowish glow deep in the sky  
of all our city lights pelting out into the universe,
- 40 I remember the feel of the pickup truck bumping  
across the ridged field, as I kept waiting for those  
childhood bursts, watching as they escorted us home.

33. The comparison in lines 8–9 of the poem is used to convey
- A. the muffled pounding of explosions in the distance.
  - B. the way lightning streaks through the clouds.
  - C. the echoes of thunder on an autumn night.
  - D. the glow of sparks falling from the sky.

34. Read lines 22–23 from the poem.

**the sky at night written upon  
with those jewels.**

What does the word choice in these lines convey about the speaker?

- E. The speaker values material possessions.
  - F. The speaker imagines that the fireworks are magical.
  - G. The speaker believes that the country setting is distinctive.
  - H. The speaker cherishes the memory of seeing fireworks as a child.
35. The use of italics on the word “*night*” in line 24 is most likely intended to emphasize the
- A. sense of mystery in the darkness.
  - B. sense of absolute darkness.
  - C. speaker’s fear of night.
  - D. speaker’s certainty about that night.
36. What is the purpose of the repeated words “rising and falling” in lines 26 and 37?
- E. to create a distinction between solitude and meaningful interaction
  - F. to demonstrate a connection between the speaker’s past and present
  - G. to emphasize the speaker’s attention to the surrounding sounds
  - H. to compare the fireworks to common sights and sounds
37. What impact does the phrase “Everything is a constant celebration” (line 33) have in the poem?
- A. It reveals that the speaker finds the city more pleasurable than the country.
  - B. It suggests that the persistent brightness of the city can be overwhelming to the speaker.
  - C. It implies that what is normal in the city was unusual in the country.
  - D. It emphasizes the hectic pace of daily life in the city.

**38.** Read lines 41–42 from the poem.

**I kept waiting for those  
childhood bursts, watching as they escorted us home.**

How does this memory affect the speaker?

- E.** The speaker believes it is impossible to ever return to a place in the past.
  - F.** The speaker is still amused by the impatience felt during fireworks displays.
  - G.** The speaker now regrets abandoning the rural way of life.
  - H.** The speaker feels a sense of comfort when reflecting on the past.
- 39.** The fireworks in the poem represent the speaker’s
- A.** wish to return to a simpler way of living.
  - B.** bittersweet feelings about leaving the past behind.
  - C.** high expectations for everyday life.
  - D.** reflections on past interactions with relatives.