

## ***Journal: Perspective and Rilke's "The Panther"***

### ***Part 1***

1. Read the poem. To the right of each stanza, write a *literal* paraphrase (rephrase the stanza in your own words). Resist the urge to jump to interpretation.
2. In your journal: Explain the overall significance of the poem's literal meaning. What is it saying about the life of the panther? Contrast the poem's meaning with Pi's perspective in chapter 4 of *Life of Pi*. Whose perspective do you prefer? Why?

### **Part 2**

1. Read the author bio.
2. Read the poem again. In a different ink color and to the right of each literal paraphrase, interpret the meaning of each stanza as it applies to our understanding of Rilke's life.
3. In your journal: Explain your second interpretation of the poem. How does it differ from the first? Which interpretation do you prefer? Why?

# The Panther

Ranier Maria Rilke

*Translated by Stephen Mitchell*

IN THE JARDIN DES PLANTES, PARIS

His vision, from the constantly passing bars,  
has grown so weary that it cannot hold  
anything else. It seems to him there are  
a thousand bars; and behind the bars, no world.

As he paces in cramped circles, over and over,  
the movement of his powerful soft strides  
is like a ritual dance around a center  
in which a mighty will stands paralyzed.

Only at times, the curtain of the pupils  
lifts, quietly—. An image enters in,  
rushes down through the tensed, arrested muscles,  
plunges into the heart and is gone.



## IMAGERY & FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE:

*Rilke evokes an emotional response from the reader through his use of imagery and figurative language in his poem. Can you locate examples of the following devices in "The Panther"?*

**IMAGERY:** Words and phrases that make you *feel* something by recreating sensory experiences

**SIMILE:** a comparison between two unlike things using the words like or as

**METAPHOR:** a comparison between two unlike things without the words like or as

**PERSONIFICATION:** description of an animal, a place, or an idea in human terms

# Ranier Maria Rilke

[rah-y-nuh r mah-ree-ah ril-kuh]

**1875–1926**

## His Works

Widely recognized as one of the most lyrically intense German-language poets, Rainer Maria Rilke was unique in his efforts to expand the realm of poetry through new uses of syntax and imagery and in the philosophy that his poems explored.

Rilke wrote “The Panther” after the famous sculptor Auguste Rodin had advised him to go to the Paris zoo and look at an animal long enough to see it truly.

In his collections of complex and daringly original poetry, Rilke expresses his belief in the spiritual unity of all things.

## His Early Life

He was born René Karl Wilhelm Johann Josef Maria Rilke in Prague, capital of Bohemia (then part of Austria-Hungary, now the Czech Republic). His childhood and youth in Prague were not especially happy. His father, Josef Rilke, became a railway official after an unsuccessful military career. His mother, Sophie (Phia) Entz, came from a well-to-do Prague family. The relationship between Phia and her only son was colored by her mourning for a prior child, a daughter, who had died after only a week of life. During Rilke's early years Phia acted as if she sought to recover the lost girl through the boy by dressing him in girl's clothing. The parents' marriage fell apart in 1884. His parents pressured the poetically and artistically talented youth into entering a military academy, which he attended from 1886 until 1891, when he left due to illness. From 1892 to 1895 he was tutored for the university entrance exam, which he passed in 1895. In 1895 and 1896, he studied literature, art history, and philosophy in Prague and Munich.

Rilke grew up in a household where his father's failure in the military led to a consequent wish for Rilke to attain those achievements he had been denied. His mother's grief for and inability to deal with the death of her previously born girl child resulted in her raising Rilke as a girl, leading to a presumably anguished and confused onset to life.

Rilke went through military school labeled as being “different.” His desire for poetry and literature could not be fulfilled in this strict world.

Prague would live on in his memory as a “miserable city of subordinate existence,” a sentiment which would later resound in his poetry.

-adapted from *Catalyze Your Story, Speak Your Truth*, 2012