Pulitzer Prize winner Annie Dillard is best known as a nature writer; her works often describe the world around her in close detail and then leap off into the metaphysical. In the world of Annie Dillard, a walk in the woods becomes an almost spiritual event. Dillard’s most famous books are *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974) and *An American Childhood* (1984); she currently teaches creative writing at Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

**Death of a Moth**

One night a moth flew into the candle, was caught, burnt dry, and held. I must have been staring at the candle, or maybe I looked up when a shadow crossed my page; at any rate, I saw it all. A golden female moth, a biggish one with a two-inch wingspread, flapped into the fire, dropped abdomen into the wet wax, stuck, flamed, frazzled, and fried in a second. Her moving wings ignited like tissue paper, enlarging the circle of light in the clearing and creating out of the darkness the sudden blue sleeves of my sweater, the green leaves of jewelweed by my side, the ragged red trunk of a pine. At once the light contracted again and the moth’s wings vanished in a fine, foul smoke. At the same time, her six legs clawed, curled, blackened, and ceased, disappearing utterly. And her head jerked in spasms, making a spattering noise; her antennae crisped and burnt away and her heaving mouthparts cracked like pistol fire. When it was all over, her head was, so far as I could determine, gone, gone the long way of her wings and legs. Had she been new, or old? Had she mated and laid her eggs, had she done her work? All that was left was the glowing horn shell of her abdomen and thorax -- a fraying, partially collapsed gold tube jammed upright in the candle’s round pool.

And then this moth-essence, this spectacular skeleton, began to act as a wick. She kept burning. The wax rose in the moth’s body from her soaking abdomen to her thorax to the shattered hole where her head should have been, and widened into a flame, a saffron-yellow flame that robed her to the ground like an immolating monk. That candle had two wicks, two winding flames of identical light, side by side. The moth’s head was fire. She burned for two hours, until I blew her out.

She burned for two hours without changing, without bending or leaning -- only glowing within, like a building fire glimpsed through silhouetted walls, like a hollow saint, like a flame-faced virgin gone to God, while I read by her light, kindled, while Rimbaud in Paris burnt out his brain in a thousand poems, while night pooled wetly at my feet.
Write a sentence in which you establish the author’s overall rhetorical purpose.

Now, write three sentences in which you identify the author’s purpose for each individual paragraph.

How many different rhetorical techniques can you find in the passage? Start a list.

How does the writer employ logos, pathos, and ethos?

What is the overall tone of the passage?

When does the tone shift? From what to what?

Do you know what an “immolating monk” would be?

Define the word “kindled” as it is used in the passage.

Can you make sense of the reference to the poet Rimbaud that occurs at the end of the passage?