Carpe diem is Latin for ‘seize the day’. It is an expression that encourages people to live every day to the full and don’t waste time putting things off.

‘To His Coy Mistress’ is an example of a carpe diem poem.

1. Do you agree that people should ‘seize the day’?
2. What are the advantages to doing this?
3. What are the disadvantages?
In this poem, the speaker is encouraging his mistress to ‘seize the day’ and enjoy life (by sleeping with him) before it is too late.
But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long
preserv'd
virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust.
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none I think do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour,
Than languish in his slow-
chapp'd
power.
Let us roll all our strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one ball;
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life.
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day;
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood;
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,
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Let us roll all our strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one ball;
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life.
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.
Write down what you think the poem is about.
The speaker of the poem addresses a woman who has been slow to respond to his sexual advances. He is encouraging her to seize the day and enjoy life (by sleeping with him) as when she is dead she won’t be able to.

In the first stanza he describes how he would love her if they had an unlimited amount of time. He could spend centuries admiring each part of her body and it wouldn’t matter if she rejected him.

In the second stanza, he remembers how short human life is. Once it is over, the opportunity to enjoy each other is gone because no one embraces in the grave.

In the last stanza, the speaker urges the woman to comply, arguing that in loving each other with passion they will make the most of the short time they have to live.
Had we but world enough, and time,  
This coyness, lady, were no crime.  
We would sit down and think which way  
To walk, and pass our long love's day;  
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side  
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide  
Of Humber would complain. I would  
Love you ten years before the Flood;  
And you should, if you please, refuse  
Till the conversion of the Jews.

Coyness = hesitancy, or playing hard to get

Marvell uses images which suggest a long passage of time; for example, a journey down the Ganges in Asia. The flood he refers to is the flood of Noah in the Bible.

Rubies are believed to protect virginity

This refers to the length of time it would take for all Jewish people to convert to Christianity. The poet uses this image to exaggerate the amount of time that his ‘mistress’ could keep rejecting him.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
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And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust.
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none I think do there embrace.

The speaker can hear the passage of time.

A metaphor to describe the endless emptiness of time.

After all this time her beauty will disappear and no-one will want her except for the worms, who will try to take her virginity.

The speaker is saying that no-one will want her when she is dead.

What does he mean when he says his ‘lust’ will turn to ‘ashes’?

‘Quaint’ honour suggests that she is being old-fashioned and a prude. If she doesn’t take him now, then she will lose her chance and no-one will want her.
Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour,
Than languish in his slow-chapp'd power.
Let us roll all our strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one ball;
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life.
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

What do the first four lines mean?

We should ‘sport’ while we still can.

Chewing or eating slowly

‘Am’rous’ means people who are in love. Why use this simile to describe young lovers?

The sun is a symbol of life - you can’t stop time, but you can make it more
In your book, sum up what is being said in each stanza:

Stanza 1:

Stanza 2:

Stanza 3:
Stanza 1:
In the first stanza, the speaker states that if he had all the time in the world he would spend centuries admiring each part of his mistress’ body.

Stanza 2:
In stanza two, the speaker remembers that life is short. He tries to persuade his mistress by reminding her that when she is dead, no-one will want to ‘embrace’ her.

Stanza 3:
In stanza three, the speaker argues that they should live life to the full while they still can, using a variety of images to describe their sexual union.
Write down your analysis of the following quotation:

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, Lady, were no crime.
Write down your analysis of the following quotation:

I would love you ten years before the Flood
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
Write down your analysis of the following quotation:

My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow;
Find a quotation in which the speaker states that his mistress deserves to have lots of attention paid to her.
Find a quotation in which the speaker says that the lady will not be desired once she is in the grave.
Find a quotation in which the poet states that they cannot stop time but they can make the most of today.
Title: How does the speaker in the poem try to persuade his mistress to agree with him?
Use quotations and explain them in your answer.
Write about:
• The speaker’s argument in the first stanza? Give examples.
• The speaker’s argument in the second stanza. Give examples.
• The speaker’s argument in the final stanza. Give examples.
• What you think the message of the poem is.

Focus on how language has been used by the poet throughout the poem.
Example sentence starters:
The speaker states...
Marvell writes....
Marvell uses a simile to describe...
The effect of this is......