

**1. A Psalm of Life**  
**By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**

*What The Heart Of The Young Man Said To The Psalmist.*

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,  
Life is but an empty dream!  
For the soul is dead that slumbers,  
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!  
And the grave is not its goal;  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,  
Is our destined end or way;  
But to act, that each to-morrow  
Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,  
And our hearts, though stout and brave,  
Still, like muffled drums, are beating  
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,  
In the bivouac of Life,  
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!  
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!  
Let the dead Past bury its dead!  
Act,— act in the living Present!  
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,  
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,  
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,  
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,  
With a heart for any fate;  
Still achieving, still pursuing,  
Learn to labor and to wait.

## 2. What is Life?

By John Clare

And what is Life?—An hour-glass on the run,  
A Mist retreating from the morning sun,  
    A busy, bustling, still repeated dream;  
Its length?—A minute's pause, a moment's thought;  
    And happiness?—A bubble on the stream,  
That in the act of seizing shrinks to nought.

What are vain Hopes?—The puffing gale of morn,  
    That of its charms divests the dewy lawn,  
And robs each flow'ret of its gem,—and dies;  
    A cobweb hiding disappointment's thorn,  
Which stings more keenly through the thin disguise.

And thou, O Trouble?—nothing can suppose,  
(And sure the power of wisdom only knows,)  
    What need requireth thee:  
So free and liberal as thy bounty flows,  
    Some necessary cause must surely be:  
But disappointments, pains, and every woe  
    Devoted wretches feel,  
The universal plagues of life below,  
    Are mysteries still 'neath Fate's unbroken seal.

And what is Death? is still the cause unfound?  
That dark, mysterious name of horrid sound?—  
    A long and lingering sleep, the weary crave.  
And Peace? where can its happiness abound?—  
    No where at all, save heaven, and the grave.

Then what is Life?—When stripp'd of its disguise,  
    A thing to be desir'd it cannot be;  
Since every thing that meets our foolish eyes  
    Gives proof sufficient of its vanity.  
'Tis but a trial all must undergo;  
    To teach unthankful mortals how to prize  
That happiness vain man's denied to know,  
    Until he's call'd to claim it in the skies.

### 3. Youth and Art By Robert Browning

It once might have been, once only:  
We lodged in a street together,  
You, a sparrow on the housetop lonely,  
I, a lone she-bird of his feather.

Your trade was with sticks and clay,  
You thumbed, thrust, patted and polished,  
Then laughed "They will see some day  
Smith made, and Gibson demolished."

My business was song, song, song;  
I chirped, cheeped, trilled and twittered,  
"Kate Brown's on the boards ere long,  
And Grisi's existence embittered!"

I earned no more by a warble  
Than you by a sketch in plaster;  
You wanted a piece of marble,  
I needed a music-master.

We studied hard in our styles,  
Chipped each at a crust like Hindoos,  
For air looked out on the tiles,  
For fun watched each other's windows.

You lounged, like a boy of the South,  
Cap and blouse—nay, a bit of beard too;  
Or you got it, rubbing your mouth  
With fingers the clay adhered to.

And I—soon managed to find  
Weak points in the flower-fence facing,  
Was forced to put up a blind  
And be safe in my corset-lacing.

No harm! It was not my fault  
If you never turned your eye's tail up  
As I shook upon E *in alt*,  
Or ran the chromatic scale up:

For spring bade the sparrows pair,  
And the boys and girls gave guesses,  
And stalls in our street looked rare  
With bulrush and watercresses.

Why did not you pinch a flower  
In a pellet of clay and fling it?

Why did not I put a power  
Of thanks in a look, or sing it?

I did look, sharp as a lynx,  
(And yet the memory rankles,)  
When models arrived, some minx  
Tripped up-stairs, she and her ankles.

But I think I gave you as good!  
“That foreign fellow,—who can know  
How she pays, in a playful mood,  
For his tuning her that piano?”

Could you say so, and never say  
“Suppose we join hands and fortunes,  
And I fetch her from over the way,  
Her, piano, and long tunes and short tunes?”

No, no: you would not be rash,  
Nor I rasher and something over:  
You’ve to settle yet Gibson’s hash,  
And Grisi yet lives in clover.

But you meet the Prince at the Board,  
I’m queen myself at *bals-paré*,  
I’ve married a rich old lord,  
And you’re dubbed knight and an R.A.

Each life unfulfilled, you see;  
It hangs still, patchy and scrappy:  
We have not sighed deep, laughed free,  
Starved, feasted, despaired,—been happy.

And nobody calls you a dunce,  
And people suppose me clever:  
This could but have happened once,  
And we missed it, lost it for ever.

#### 4. Among School Children By William Butler Yeats

I

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;  
A kind old nun in a white hood replies;  
The children learn to cipher and to sing,  
To study reading-books and history,  
To cut and sew, be neat in everything  
In the best modern way—the children's eyes  
In momentary wonder stare upon  
A sixty-year-old smiling public man.

II

I dream of a Ledaean body, bent  
Above a sinking fire, a tale that she  
Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event  
That changed some childish day to tragedy—  
Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent  
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,  
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,  
Into the yolk and white of the one shell.

III

And thinking of that fit of grief or rage  
I look upon one child or t'other there  
And wonder if she stood so at that age—  
For even daughters of the swan can share  
Something of every paddler's heritage—  
And had that colour upon cheek or hair,  
And thereupon my heart is driven wild:  
She stands before me as a living child.

IV

Her present image floats into the mind—  
Did Quattrocento finger fashion it  
Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind  
And took a mess of shadows for its meat?  
And I though never of Ledaean kind  
Had pretty plumage once—enough of that,  
Better to smile on all that smile, and show  
There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

V

What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap  
Honey of generation had betrayed,  
And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape  
As recollection or the drug decide,  
Would think her son, did she but see that shape  
With sixty or more winters on its head,  
A compensation for the pang of his birth,  
Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?

VI

Plato thought nature but a spume that plays  
Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;  
Solider Aristotle played the taws  
Upon the bottom of a king of kings;  
World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras  
Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings  
What a star sang and careless Muses heard:  
Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.

VII

Both nuns and mothers worship images,  
But those the candles light are not as those  
That animate a mother's reveries,  
But keep a marble or a bronze repose.  
And yet they too break hearts—O Presences  
That passion, piety or affection knows,  
And that all heavenly glory symbolise—  
O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;

VIII

Labour is blossoming or dancing where  
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,  
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,  
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.  
O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

## **5. Human Family**

**By Maya Angelou**

I note the obvious differences  
in the human family.  
Some of us are serious,  
some thrive on comedy.

Some declare their lives are lived  
as true profundity,  
and others claim they really live  
the real reality.

The variety of our skin tones  
can confuse, bemuse, delight,  
brown and pink and beige and purple,  
tan and blue and white.

I've sailed upon the seven seas  
and stopped in every land,  
I've seen the wonders of the world  
not yet one common man.

I know ten thousand women  
called Jane and Mary Jane,  
but I've not seen any two  
who really were the same.

Mirror twins are different  
although their features jibe,  
and lovers think quite different thoughts  
while lying side by side.

We love and lose in China,  
we weep on England's moors,  
and laugh and moan in Guinea,  
and thrive on Spanish shores.

We seek success in Finland,  
are born and die in Maine.  
In minor ways we differ,  
in major we're the same.

I note the obvious differences  
between each sort and type,  
but we are more alike, my friends,  
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,  
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,  
than we are unlike.

**6. Alone**  
**By Maya Angelou**

Lying, thinking  
Last night  
How to find my soul a home  
Where water is not thirsty  
And bread loaf is not stone  
I came up with one thing  
And I don't believe I'm wrong  
That nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires  
With money they can't use  
Their wives run round like banshees  
Their children sing the blues  
They've got expensive doctors  
To cure their hearts of stone.  
But nobody  
No, nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely  
I'll tell you what I know  
Storm clouds are gathering  
The wind is gonna blow  
The race of man is suffering  
And I can hear the moan,  
'Cause nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

**7. And People Stayed Home**  
**By Kathleen O'Meara**

And people stayed home  
And read books and listened  
And rested and exercised  
And made art and played  
And learned new ways of being  
And stopped  
And listened deeper  
Someone meditated  
Someone prayed  
Someone danced  
Someone met their shadow  
And people began to think differently  
And people healed  
And in the absence of people who lived in ignorant ways  
Dangerous, meaningless and heartless,  
Even the earth began to heal  
And when the danger ended  
And people found each other  
Grieved for the dead people  
And they made new choices  
And dreamed of new visions  
And created new ways of life  
And healed the earth completely  
Just as they were healed themselves.

**8. [anyone lived in a pretty how town]**

**By e.e. cummings**

anyone lived in a pretty how town  
(with up so floating many bells down)  
spring summer autumn winter  
he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Women and men(both little and small)  
cared for anyone not at all  
they sowed their isn't they reaped their same  
sun moon stars rain

children guessed(but only a few  
and down they forgot as up they grew  
autumn winter spring summer)  
that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf  
she laughed his joy she cried his grief  
bird by snow and stir by still  
anyone's any was all to her

someones married their everyones  
laughed their cryings and did their dance  
(sleep wake hope and then)they  
said their nevers they slept their dream

stars rain sun moon  
(and only the snow can begin to explain  
how children are apt to forget to remember  
with up so floating many bells down)

one day anyone died i guess  
(and noone stooped to kiss his face)  
busy folk buried them side by side  
little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep  
and more by more they dream their sleep  
noone and anyone earth by april  
wish by spirit and if by yes.

Women and men(both dong and ding)  
summer autumn winter spring  
reaped their sowing and went their came  
sun moon stars rain

## 9. How We Could Have Lived or Died This Way by Martín Espada

Not songs of loyalty alone are these,  
But songs of insurrection also,  
For I am the sworn poet of every dauntless rebel the world over.

—Walt Whitman

I see the dark-skinned bodies falling in the street as their ancestors fell  
before the whip and steel, the last blood pooling, the last breath spitting.  
I see the immigrant street vendor flashing his wallet to the cops,  
shot so many times there are bullet holes in the soles of his feet.  
I see the deaf woodcarver and his pocketknife, crossing the street  
in front of a cop who yells, then fires. I see the drug raid, the wrong  
door kicked in, the minister's heart seizing up. I see the man hawking  
a fistful of cigarettes, the cop's chokehold that makes his wheezing  
lungs stop wheezing forever. I am in the crowd, at the window,  
kneeling beside the body left on the asphalt for hours, covered in a sheet.

I see the suicides: the conga player handcuffed for drumming on the subway,  
hanged in the jail cell with his hands cuffed behind him; the suspect leaking  
blood from his chest in the backseat of the squad car; the 300-pound boy  
said to stampede bare-handed into the bullets drilling his forehead.

I see the coroner nodding, the words he types in his report burrowing  
into the skin like more bullets. I see the government investigations stacking,  
words buzzing on the page, then suffocated as bees suffocate in a jar. I see  
the next Black man, fleeing as the fugitive slave once fled the slave-catcher,  
shot in the back for a broken tail-light. I see the cop handcuff the corpse.

I see the rebels marching, hands upraised before the riot squads,  
faces in bandannas against the tear gas, and I walk beside them unseen.  
I see the poets, who will write the songs of insurrection generations unborn  
will read or hear a century from now, words that make them wonder  
how we could have lived or died this way, how the descendants of slaves  
still fled and the descendants of slave-catchers still shot them, how we awoke  
every morning without the blood of the dead sweating from every pore.