

# 2016 National **POETRY** Recitation Contest

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## **How To Use This Sampler**

\* Poems are paired with individual lesson plans (found online) so teachers can work with their classes or English clubs on thinking critically about the poem and understanding it well. However, let conversations flow. If more questions develop out of questions asked in the plans, let the students work with those ideas too.

\* It is very important for students to understand their poems because in the case of a tie, students will be asked by judges to explain (in English or Armenian) *their personal connection to the poem.*

\* 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Form students who memorize a poem from the 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Form section will receive an extra point in judging.

\* Please familiarize yourself and your students with the rules of the contest and the judging criteria before working with students on presentation for the contests.

## 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Form Poems

### **“Assurance”**

**William Stafford**

**(January 17, 1914 - August 28, 1993, American)**

You will never be alone, you hear so deep  
a sound when autumn comes. Yellow  
pulls across the hills and thrums,  
or the silence after lightening before it says  
its names- and then the clouds' wide-mouthed  
apologies. You were aimed from birth:  
you will never be alone. Rain  
will come, a gutter filled, an Amazon,  
long aisles- you never heard so deep a sound,  
moss on rock, and years. You turn your head-  
that's what the silence meant: you're not alone.  
The whole wide world pours down.

### **“Forbearance”**

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**(May 25, 1803 - April 27, 1882, American)**

Hast thou named all the birds without a gun?  
Loved the wood-rose, and left it on its stalk?  
At rich men's tables eaten bread and pulse?  
Unarmed, faced danger with a heart of trust?  
And loved so well a high behavior,  
In man or maid, that thou from speech refrained,  
Nobility more nobly to repay?  
O, be my friend, and teach me to be thine!

**“Hope is the Thing with Feathers”**

**Emily Dickinson**

**(December 10, 1830 - May 15, 1886, American)**

'Hope' is the thing with feathers—  
That perches in the soul—  
And sings the tune without the words—  
And never stops—at all—

And sweetest—in the Gale—is heard—  
And sore must be the storm—  
That could abash the little Bird  
That kept so many warm—

I've heard it in the chillest land—  
And on the strangest Sea—  
Yet, never, in Extremity,  
It asked a crumb—of Me.

**“I am convinced”**

**Leonard Nimoy**

**(March 26, 1931 - February 27, 2015, American)**

I am convinced  
That if all mankind  
Could only gather together  
In one circle  
Arms on each other's shoulders  
And dance, laugh and cry together  
Then much of the tension and burden of life  
Would fall away  
In the knowledge that  
We are all children  
Needing and wanting  
Each other's  
Comfort and  
Understanding  
We are all children  
Searching for love

**“Remember”**

**Christina Rossetti**

**(December 5 1830 - December 29, 1894,  
English)**

Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.  
Remember me when no more, day by day,  
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.  
Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.

**“The Spider’s Web (A Natural History)”**

**E.B. White**

**(July 11, 1899 - October 1, 1985, American)**

The spider, dropping down from twig,  
Unfolds a plan of her devising,  
A thin premeditated rig  
To use in rising.

And all that journey down through space,  
In cool descent and loyal hearted,  
She spins a ladder to the place  
From where she started.

Thus I, gone forth as spiders do  
In spider’s web a truth discerning,  
Attach one silken thread to you  
For my returning.

**“The True Knowledge”**

**Oscar Wilde**

**(October 16, 1854 - November 30, 1900, Irish)**

Thou knowest all; I seek in vain  
What lands to till or sow with seed—  
The land is black with briar and weed,  
Nor cares for falling tears or rain.

Thou knowest all; I sit and wait  
With blinded eyes and hands that fail,  
Till the last lifting of the veil  
And the first opening of the gate.

Thou knowest all; I cannot see.  
I trust I shall not live in vain,  
I know that we shall meet again  
In some divine eternity.

**“We Alone”**

**Alice Walker**

**(February 9, 1944 - present, American)**

We alone can devalue gold  
by not caring  
if it falls or rises  
in the marketplace.  
Wherever there is gold  
there is a chain, you know,  
and if your chain  
is gold  
so much the worse  
for you.

Feathers, shells  
and sea-shaped stones  
are all as rare.

This could be our revolution:  
to love what is plentiful  
as much as  
what's scarce.

**“We’ll Go No More A-Roving”  
George Gordon, Lord Byron  
(January 22, 1788 - April 19, 1824,  
English)**

So, we'll go no more a roving  
So late into the night,  
Though the heart be still as loving,  
And the moon be still as bright.  
For the sword outwears its sheath,  
And the soul wears out the breast,  
And the heart must pause to breathe,  
And love itself have rest.  
Though the night was made for loving,  
And the day returns too soon,  
Yet we'll go no more a roving  
By the light of the moon.

## 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> Form Poems

### **“Aboard At A Ship’s Helm”**

**Walt Whitman**

**(May 31, 1819 - March 26, 1892, American)**

ABOARD, at a ship's helm,  
A young steersman, steering with care.

A bell through fog on a sea-coast dolefully ringing,  
An ocean-bell--O a warning bell, rock'd by the waves.

O you give good notice indeed, you bell by the sea-reefs ringing,  
Ringing, ringing, to warn the ship from its wreck-place.

For, as on the alert, O steersman, you mind the bell's admonition,  
The bows turn,--the freighted ship, tacking,  
speeds away under her gray sails,  
The beautiful and noble ship, with all her precious wealth, speeds  
away gaily and safe.

But O the ship, the immortal ship! O ship aboard the ship!  
O ship of the body--ship of the soul--voyaging, voyaging, voyaging.

### **“As I Grew Older”**

**Langston Hughes**

**(February 1, 1902 - May 22, 1967, American)**

It was a long time ago.  
I have almost forgotten my dream.  
But it was there then,  
In front of me,  
Bright like a sun—  
My dream.  
And then the wall rose,  
Rose slowly,  
Slowly,  
Between me and my dream.  
Rose until it touched the sky—  
The wall.  
Shadow.  
I am black.  
I lie down in the shadow.  
No longer the light of my dream before me,  
Above me.  
Only the thick wall.  
Only the shadow.  
My hands!  
My dark hands!  
Break through the wall!  
Find my dream!  
Help me to shatter this darkness,  
To smash this night,  
To break this shadow  
Into a thousand lights of sun,  
Into a thousand whirling dreams  
Of sun!

**“Clouds”**  
**Sandra Cisneros**  
**(December 20, 1954 - Present, Mexican-American)**

Before you became a cloud, you were an ocean, roiled and murmuring like a mouth. You were the shadows of a cloud crossing over a field of tulips. You were the tears of a man who cried into a plaid handkerchief.

You were the sky without a hat. Your heart puffed and flowered like sheets drying on a line.

And when you were a tree, you listened to the trees and the tree things trees told you. You were the wind in the wheels of a red bicycle. You were the spidery Maria tattooed on the hairless arm of a boy in downtown Houston. You were the rain rolling off the waxy leaves of a magnolia tree. A lock of straw-colored hair wedged between the mottled pages of a Victor Hugo novel.

A crescent of soap. A spider the color of a fingernail.

The black nets beneath the sea of olive trees.

A skein of blue wool. A tea saucer wrapped in newspaper.

An empty cracker tin. A bowl of blueberries in heavy cream. White wine in a green-stemmed glass.

And when you opened your wings to wind, across the punched-tin sky above a prison courtyard, those condemned to death and those condemned to life watched how smooth and sweet a white cloud glides.



**“Coal”**  
**Audre Lorde**  
**(February 18, 1934 - November 17, 1992,**  
**Caribbean-American)**

I  
Is the total black, being spoken  
From the earth's inside.  
There are many kinds of open.  
How a diamond comes into a knot of flame  
How a sound comes into a word, coloured  
By who pays what for speaking.

Some words are open  
Like a diamond on glass windows  
Singing out within the crash of passing sun  
Then there are words like stapled wagers  
In a perforated book—buy and sign and tear apart—  
And come whatever wills all chances  
The stub remains  
An ill-pulled tooth with a ragged edge.  
Some words live in my throat  
Breeding like adders. Others know sun  
Seeking like gypsies over my tongue  
To explode through my lips  
Like young sparrows bursting from shell.  
Some words  
Bedevil me.

Love is a word another kind of open—  
As a diamond comes into a knot of flame  
I am black because I come from the earth's inside  
Take my word for jewel in your open light.

**“Cotton Candy On A Rainy Day”**  
**Nikki Giovanni**  
**(June 7, 1943 - present, American)**

Don't look now  
I'm fading away  
Into the gray of my mornings  
Or the blues of every night

Is it that my nails  
keep breaking  
Or maybe the corn  
on my second little piggy  
Things keep popping out  
on my face or of my life

It seems no matter how  
I try I become more difficult  
to hold  
I am not an easy woman  
to want

They have asked  
the psychiatrists . . . psychologists . . .  
politicians and social workers  
What this decade will be  
known for

There is no doubt . . . it is  
loneliness

**“Expect Nothing”**

**Alice Walker**

**(February 9, 1944 - present, American)**

Expect nothing. Live frugally  
On surprise.  
become a stranger  
To need of pity  
Or, if compassion be freely  
Given out  
Take only enough  
Stop short of urge to plead  
Then purge away the need.

Wish for nothing larger  
Than your own small heart  
Or greater than a star;  
Tame wild disappointment  
With caress unmoved and cold  
Make of it a parka  
For your soul.

Discover the reason why  
So tiny human midget  
Exists at all  
So scared unwise  
But expect nothing. Live frugally  
On surprise.

**“Here In This Spring”**

**Dylan Thomas**

**(October 27, 1914 - November 9, 1953, Welsh)**

Here in this spring, stars float along the void;  
Here in this ornamental winter  
Down pelts the naked weather;  
This summer buries a spring bird.

Symbols are selected from the years'  
Slow rounding of four seasons' coasts,  
In autumn teach three seasons' fires  
And four birds' notes.

I should tell summer from the trees, the  
worms  
Tell, if at all, the winter's storms  
Or the funeral of the sun;  
I should learn spring by the cuckooing,  
And the slug should teach me destruction.

A worm tells summer better than the clock,  
The slug's a living calendar of days;  
What shall it tell me if a timeless insect  
Says the world wears away?

**“How Do I Love Thee?”**

**Elizabeth Barrett Browning**

**(March 6, 1806 - June 29, 1861, English)**

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.  
I love thee to the level of every day's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.  
I love with a passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints, -- I love thee with the  
breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life! -- and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.

**“I Am the Autumnal Sun”**

**Henry David Thoreau**

**(July 12, 1817 - May 6, 1862, American)**

Sometimes a mortal feels in himself Nature  
-- not his Father but his Mother stirs  
within him, and he becomes immortal with  
her  
immortality.  
From time to time she claims  
kindredship with us, and some globule  
from her veins steals up into our own.

I am the autumnal sun,  
With autumn gales my race is run;  
When will the hazel put forth its flowers,  
Or the grape ripen under my bowers?  
When will the harvest or the hunter's moon  
Turn my midnight into mid-noon?  
I am all sere and yellow,  
And to my core mellow.

The mast is dropping within my woods,  
The winter is lurking within my moods,  
And the rustling of the withered leaf

Is the constant music of my grief.

**“I Sit And Think”**

**J.R.R. Tolkien**

**(January 3, 1892 - September 2, 1973,  
English)**

I sit beside the fire and think of all that I  
    have seen,  
    of meadow-flowers and butterflies in  
    summers that have been;  
Of yellow leaves and gossamer in autumns  
    that there were,  
with morning mist and silver sun and wind  
    upon my hair.

I sit beside the fire and think of how the  
    world will be  
when winter comes without a spring that I  
    shall ever see.

For still there are so many things that I  
    have never seen:  
in every wood in every spring there is a  
    different green.  
I sit beside the fire and think of people long  
    ago,  
and people who will see a world that I shall  
    never know.  
But all the while I sit and think of times  
    there were before,  
I listen for returning feet and voices at the  
    door.

**“If I Could Tell You”**

**WH Auden**

**(February 21, 1907 - September 29, 1973, American)**

Time will say nothing but I told you so  
Time only knows the price we have to pay;  
If I could tell you I would let you know.

If we should weep when clowns put on their  
show,  
If we should stumble when musicians play,  
Time will say nothing but I told you so.

There are no fortunes to be told, although,  
Because I love you more than I can say,  
If I could tell you I would let you know.

The winds must come from somewhere when  
they blow,  
There must be reason why the leaves decay;  
Time will say nothing but I told you so.

Perhaps the roses really want to grow,  
The vision seriously intends to stay;  
If I could tell you I would let you know.

Suppose the lions all get up and go,  
And the brooks and soldiers run away;  
Will Time say nothing but I told you so?  
If I could tell you I would let you know.

**“Les Ballons”**

**Oscar Wilde**

**(October 16, 1854 - November 30, 1900,  
Irish)**

Against these turbid turquoise skies  
The light and luminous balloons  
Dip and drift like satin moons  
Drift like silken butterflies;

Reel with every windy gust,  
Rise and reel like dancing girls,  
Float like strange transparent pearls,  
Fall and float like silver dust.

Now to the low leaves they cling,  
Each with coy fantastic pose,  
Each a petal of a rose  
Straining at a gossamer string.

Then to the tall trees they climb,  
Like thin globes of amethyst,  
Wandering opals keeping tryst  
With the rubies of the lime.

**“Let Me Tell You What a Poem Brings”**

**Juan Felipe Herrera**

**(December 24, 1948 - present, Mexican-American)**

Before you go further,  
let me tell you what a poem brings,  
first, you must know the secret, there is no poem  
to speak of, it is a way to attain a life without boundaries,  
yes, it is that easy, a poem, imagine me telling you this,  
instead of going day by day against the razors, well,  
the judgments, all the tick-tock bronze, a leather jacket  
sizing you up, the fashion mall, for example, from  
the outside you think you are being entertained,  
when you enter, things change, you get caught by surprise,  
your mouth goes sour, you get thirsty, your legs grow cold  
standing still in the middle of a storm, a poem, of course,  
is always open for business too, except, as you can see,  
it isn't exactly business that pulls your spirit into  
the alarming waters, there you can bathe, you can play,  
you can even join in on the gossip—the mist, that is,  
the mist becomes central to your existence.

**“Mirror”**

**Sylvia Plath**

**(October 27, 1932 - February 11, 1963, American)**

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.  
Whatever I see I swallow immediately  
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.  
I am not cruel, only truthful,  
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.  
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.  
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long  
I think it is part of my heart. But it flickers.  
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,  
Searching my reaches for what she really is.  
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.  
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.  
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.  
I am important to her. She comes and goes.  
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.  
In me she has drowned a young girl,  
and in me an old woman  
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

**“Ozymandias”**

**Percy Bysshe Shelley**

**(August 4, 1792 - July 8, 1822, English)**

I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

**“Pretty Boy”**  
**Rita Dove**  
**(August 28, 1952 - Present, American)**

Can't say he walked the walk.  
Talked it, but everybody  
    did that, everybody  
had a story to front,  
the essential mess of their life.

He was pretty, though. Nobody  
messed with the sight of him  
because it messed with them  
first,  
that invisible mirror

shining the truth  
straight back. O he had it easy  
out there  
    in the world,  
    promenading

his bright skin and curls,  
his agreeably knobbed nose,  
eyes black and brown lips  
plush enough to sink  
a lady's dreams into  
all night...

Nobody told him the truth.  
Nobody had a truth worth telling  
so they talked all the time,  
no secret safe  
a week, a day, through Sunday tea—

No one could tell him anything  
he really needed:  
the idea of something  
precious, soothing.  
He walked the length of St. James

and kept his hankie in his sleeve;  
he willed himself to smell the rot,  
powdered wigs and mud and  
dying children; he looked and looked  
until he met

one keen eye  
seeing everything, too:  
Old Black Billy Waters,  
peg leg and fiddle  
just a-going, laughing as if to say

*Whatcha gonna do with that stare?*  
and tossing it  
back,  
quick as a coin  
flipped into  
a cup.

**“The Cat and the Moon”**  
**W.B. Yeats**  
**(June 13, 1865 - January 28, 1939, Irish)**

THE cat went here and there  
And the moon spun round like a top,  
And the nearest kin of the moon,  
The creeping cat, looked up.  
Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon,  
For, wander and wail as he would,  
The pure cold light in the sky  
Troubled his animal blood.  
Minnaloushe runs in the grass  
Lifting his delicate feet.  
Do you dance, Minnaloushe, do you dance?  
When two close kindred meet.  
What better than call a dance?  
Maybe the moon may learn,  
Tired of that courtly fashion,  
A new dance turn.  
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass  
From moonlit place to place,  
The sacred moon overhead  
Has taken a new phase.  
Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils  
Will pass from change to change,  
And that from round to crescent,  
From crescent to round they range?  
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass  
Alone, important and wise,  
And lifts to the changing moon  
His changing eyes.

**“The Chimney Sweeper (Songs of Innocence)”**  
**William Blake**  
**(November 28, 1757 - August 12, 1827, English)**

When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!  
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,  
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved: so I said,  
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet; and that very night,  
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight, -  
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,  
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black.

And by came an angel who had a bright key,  
And he opened the coffins and set them all free;  
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,  
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;  
And the angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father, and never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,  
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.  
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm;  
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.



**“The Snow Man”**

**Wallace Stevens**

**(October 2, 1879 - August 2, 1955, American)**

One must have a mind of winter  
To regard the frost and the boughs  
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time  
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,  
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think  
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land  
Full of the same wind  
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,  
And, nothing himself, beholds  
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

**“The Waking”**

**Theodore Roethke**

**(May 25, 1908 - August 1, 1963, American)**

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?  
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?  
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,  
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?  
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do  
To you and me; so take the lively air,  
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.  
What falls away is always. And is near.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

**“The Widow’s Lament in Springtime”**  
**William Carlos Williams**  
**(September 17, 1883 - March 4, 1963,**  
**American)**

Sorrow is my own yard  
where the new grass  
flames as it has flamed  
often before, but not  
with the cold fire  
that closes round me this year.  
Thirty-five years  
I lived with my husband.  
The plum tree is white today  
with masses of flowers.  
Masses of flowers  
load the cherry branches  
and color some bushes  
yellow and some red,  
but the grief in my heart  
is stronger than they,  
for though they were my joy  
formerly, today I notice them  
and turn away forgetting.  
Today my son told me  
that in the meadows,  
at the edge of the heavy woods  
in the distance, he saw  
trees of white flowers.  
I feel that I would like  
to go there  
and fall into those flowers  
and sink into the marsh near them.