Directions: Read the poems below, and pick one that you feel you can relate to. Be prepared to explain how the poem relates to you. (The first poem is not part of the list.)

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| *“I am a poem”**I am a poem—but you might not know**I`m a great gift, as far as gifts go.**Some of us were written**with a purpose in mind,**Whether it`s to make you think**or help you unwind.**Some of us tell stories,**imagined or real;**some of us are warnings and**some of us are fears;**some of us wear our purpose**like a big, bright sign;**some of us hide it**in between the lines.**The best ones are those of us**who can make you feel engaged—**as if our words were rising**right out of the page.**So look at me and all the rest,**and pick the one that suits you best!* | *Ms. Rossi - 2019* |
| “We Are of a Tribe” We plant seeds in the groundAnd dreams in the sky, Hoping that, someday, the roots of oneWill meet the upstretched limbs of the other. It has not happened yet.We share the sky, all of us, the whole world: Together, we are a tribe of eyes that look upward,Even as we stand on uncertain ground. The earth beneath us moves, quiet and wild,Its boundaries shifting, its muscles wavering. The dream of sky is indifferent to all this,Impervious to borders, fences, reservations. The sky is our common home, the place we all live.There we are in the world together. The dream of sky requires no passport.Blue will not be fenced. Blue will not be a crime. Look up. Stay awhile. Let your breathing slow.Know that you always have a home here. | [Alberto Rios](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/alberto-rios) - 2014 |
| “The Animal”Is shut out on a balcony above the street.He is a prisoner among us, cryingThe awful boredom of observation, the unendingHours of afternoon empty to a creatureOf smell and chase. His poor eyes see shadowsPass below; they are unsatisfactory.Voices come from nowhere. They do not hear him.Why does he live? He tries to howl but soundFlattens in a bred-thin throat. Whoever owns himConsigns him to nothing when they go away. Across the street, I hear the constant sound of nothingLashing him. He gives up, then gives up Giving up, and cries again. DesireWon't let him alone: to be with the worldBeyond him, to move among things and creatures,To be where we are passing and meeting. But he is notOne of us; it is not his world. He wears a collarAnd prances unnaturally along a fence, pressingThe edge, walking upright begging, and is refused,Put out, tied up, and kept. | [Cynthia Huntington](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/cynthia-huntington) - 1996 |
| “Grandmother Portrait”Here's a small gray womanin an enormous beaver coat standing at the end of the curbof a street in Brooklyn, her strapped heel about to be lowered to asphalt. I'm strolling beside her carrying a sack, the sidewalk shaded by cranked out awnings:butchers, bakeries, shoe repair shops the smell of rotting eggs, as we climb up to her sixth floor apartmentwith its plastic slip-covered chairs, the long chain for a toilet flusher,pocks in the plaster ceiling. She is my Romanian grandmotherwho speaks little English, but taught me to crochet, now lost among the broken headstonesof the old gated Jewish cemetery we passed by that dayafter buying our milk and our bread. | [Judith Harris](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/judith-harris) - 2018 |
| “The Red Wheelbarrow”so much dependsupona red wheelbarrowglazed with rainwaterbeside the whitechickens | [William Carlos Williams](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-carlos-williams) - 1923 |
| “[The Rose That Grew From Concrete](https://allpoetry.com/The-Rose-That-Grew-From-Concrete)”Did you hear about the rose that grewfrom a crack in the concrete?Proving nature's law is wrong itlearned to walk without having feet.Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams,it learned to breathe fresh air.Long live the rose that grew from concretewhen no one else ever cared. | Tupac Shakur - 1999 |
| “Old Friends” Old friends are a steady spring rain,or late summer sunshine edging into fall,or frosted leaves along a snowy path—a voice for all seasons saying, I know you.The older I grow, the more I fear I'll lose my old friends,as if too many years have scrolled bysince the day we sprang forth, seeking each other. Old friend, I knew you before we met.I saw you at the window of my soul—I heard you in the steady millstone of my heartgrinding grain for our daily bread.You are sedimentary, rock-solid cousin earth,where I stand firmly, astonished by your grace and truth.And gratitude comes to me and says: "Tell me anything and I will listen.Ask me anything, and I will answer you." | [Freya Manfred](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/freya-manfred) - 2018 |
| “The Thing Is”to love life, to love it evenwhen you have no stomach for itand everything you’ve held dearcrumbles like burnt paper in your hands,your throat filled with the silt of it.When grief sits with you, its tropical heatthickening the air, heavy as watermore fit for gills than lungs;when grief weights you down like your own fleshonly more of it, an obesity of grief,you think, How can a body withstand this?Then you hold life like a facebetween your palms, a plain face,no charming smile, no violet eyes,and you say, yes, I will take youI will love you, again. | [Ellen Bass](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/ellen-bass) - 2002 |
| “If We Must Die”If we must die, let it not be like hogsHunted and penned in an inglorious spot,While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,Making their mock at our accursèd lot.If we must die, O let us nobly die,So that our precious blood may not be shedIn vain; then even the monsters we defyShall be constrained to honor us though dead!O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!What though before us lies the open grave?Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack,Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back! | Claude McKay - 1919 |
| “I, Too”I, too, sing America.I am the darker brother.They send me to eat in the kitchenWhen company comes,But I laugh,And eat well,And grow strong.Tomorrow,I’ll be at the tableWhen company comes.Nobody’ll dareSay to me,“Eat in the kitchen,”Then.Besides,They’ll see how beautiful I amAnd be ashamed—I, too, am America. | Langston Hughes - 1926 |
| “Sympathy”I know what the caged bird feels, alas!    When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;   When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,   And the river flows like a stream of glass;    When the first bird sings and the first bud opens,   And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—I know what the caged bird feels!I know why the caged bird beats his wing    Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;   For he must fly back to his perch and cling   When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;    And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars   And they pulse again with a keener sting—I know why he beats his wing!I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,    When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—When he beats his bars and he would be free;It is not a carol of joy or glee,    But a prayer that he sends from his heart’s deep core,   But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—I know why the caged bird sings! | Paul Laurence Dunbar - 1899 |
| “White Lie”Christmas Eves our dad would bringHome from the farm real hayFor the reindeer that didn't existAnd after we were finally asleepWould get out and take the slabsUp in his arms and carry themBack to the bed of his pickup,Making sure to litter the snowWith chaff so he could show usIn the morning the place whereThey'd stood eating, their harnessBells dulled by the cold, their breathSteam, all while we were dreaming. | Austin Smith - 2018 |
| “We Wear the Mask”We wear the mask that grins and lies,It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—This debt we pay to human guile;With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,And mouth with myriad subtleties.Why should the world be over-wise,In counting all our tears and sighs?Nay, let them only see us, whileWe wear the mask.We smile, but, O great Christ, our criesTo thee from tortured souls arise.We sing, but oh the clay is vileBeneath our feet, and long the mile;But let the world dream otherwise,We wear the mask! | Paul Laurence Dunbar - 1913 |
| “A Poison Tree”I was angry with my friend; I told my wrath, my wrath did end.I was angry with my foe: I told it not, my wrath did grow. And I water’d it in fears,Night & morning with my tears: And I sunned it with smiles,And with soft deceitful wiles. And it grew both day and night. Till it bore an apple bright. And my foe beheld it shine,And he knew that it was mine. And into my garden stole, When the night had veil’d the pole; In the morning glad I see; My foe outstretched beneath the tree. | William Blake - 1794 |
| “Hanging Fire”I am fourteenand my skin has betrayed me   the boy I cannot live without   still sucks his thumbin secrethow come my knees arealways so ashywhat if I diebefore morningand momma's in the bedroom   with the door closed.I have to learn how to dance   in time for the next party   my room is too small for me   suppose I die before graduation   they will sing sad melodies   but finallytell the truth about meThere is nothing I want to do   and too muchthat has to be doneand momma's in the bedroom   with the door closed.Nobody even stops to think   about my side of itI should have been on Math Team   my marks were better than his   why do I have to bethe onewearing bracesI have nothing to wear tomorrow   will I live long enoughto grow upand momma's in the bedroom   with the door closed. | Audre Lorde - 1978 |
| “Napoleon”Children, when wasNapoleon Bonaparte born,asks teacher.A thousand years ago, the children say.A hundred years ago, the children say.Last year, the children say.No one knows.Children, what didNapoleon Bonaparte do,asks teacher.Won a war, the children say.Lost a war, the children say.No one knows.Our butcher had a dogcalled Napoleon,says Frantisek.The butcher used to beat him and the dog diedof hungera year ago.And all the children are now sorryfor Napoleon. | Miroslav Holub - 1956 |
| “Taking One for the Team”We practiced together,sweat and stained.We pummeled each otherand laughed off pain.Teams may disagree,may tease,may blame.Teams may bicker and whine,but get down for the game.You had my back.We fought the fight.And though our scorewas less last night,we're walking tall.Our team came throughand stuck together like Crazy Glue.I'm proud to sayI lost with you. | Sara Holbrook - 2011 |
| “Learning to love America”because it has no pure productsbecause the Pacific Ocean sweeps along the coastlinebecause the water of the ocean is coldand because land is better than oceanbecause I say we rather than theybecause I live in CaliforniaI have eaten fresh artichokesand jacaranda bloom in April and Maybecause my senses have caught up with my bodymy breath with the air it swallowsmy hunger with my mouthbecause I walk barefoot in my housebecause I have nursed my son at my breastbecause he is a strong American boybecause I have seen his eyes redden when he is asked who he isbecause he answers I don’t knowbecause to have a son is to have a countrybecause my son will bury me herebecause countries are in our blood and we bleed thembecause it is late and too late to change my mindbecause it is time. | [Shirley Geok-Lin Lim](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/shirley-geok-lin-lim) - 1998 |
| “To David, About His Education”The world is full of mostly invisible things,And there is no way but putting the mind’s eye,Or its nose, in a book, to find them out,Things like the square root of EverestOr how many times Byron goes into Texas,Or whether the law of the excluded middleApplies west of the Rockies. For theseAnd the like reasons, you have to go to schoolAnd study books and listen to what you are told,And sometimes try to remember. Though I don’t knowWhat you will do with the mean annual rainfallOn Plato’s Republic, or the calorie contentOf the Diet of Worms, such things are said to beGood for you, and you will have to learn themIn order to become one of the grown-upsWho sees invisible things neither steadily nor whole,But keeps gravely the grand confusion of the worldUnder his hat, which is where it belongs,And teaches small children to do this in their turn. | Howard Nemerov - 1990 |
| “I Am Offering this Poem”I am offering this poem to you,since I have nothing else to give.Keep it like a warm coatwhen winter comes to cover you,or like a pair of thick socksthe cold cannot bite through,                         I love you,I have nothing else to give you,so it is a pot full of yellow cornto warm your belly in winter,it is a scarf for your head, to wearover your hair, to tie up around your face,                         I love you,Keep it, treasure this as you wouldif you were lost, needing direction,in the wilderness life becomes when mature;and in the corner of your drawer,tucked away like a cabin or hoganin dense trees, come knocking,and I will answer, give you directions,and let you warm yourself by this fire,rest by this fire, and make you feel safe                         I love you,It’s all I have to give,and all anyone needs to live,and to go on living inside,when the world outsideno longer cares if you live or die;remember,                         I love you. | Jimmy Santiago Baca - 1979 |
| “I Woke Up—Smiling”I was told that I was a sad man.Sadness is a fatal disease in this placewhere happiness is a key to success.If you are sad, you are doomed to fail—you can’t please your boss,your long face won’t attract customers,a few sighs are enoughto let your friends down. Yesterday afternoon I met Pham,a Vietnamese man who was once a general.He came to this countryafter nine years’ imprisonment.Now he works hard as a custodianand always avoidsmeeting his former soldiers here,because every one of themis doing better than he is.“Sadness,” he told me,“is a luxury for me.I have no time for it.If I feel sadI won’t be able to support my family.” His words filled me with shame,although I learned long agoa busy bee feels no sorrow.He made me realize I’m still a fortunate oneand ought to be happy and gratefulfor having food in my stomachand books to read.I returned home humming a cheerful tune.My wife smiled wonderingwhy I had suddenly become lighthearted.My son followed me, laughing and frolicking,while I was capering on the floor. Last nightI went to a party in my dream.Voices and laughter were drifting in a large hallthat was full of paintings and calligraphy.Strolling with easeI ran into the handwriting of yourshung in the airpiece by piece waving like wings.Dumbfounded, I turnedand saw you sitting on a chair,motionless, the same lean detached face,only your blue clothes had grown darker.Something snapped in my chestand my tears flowed.What’s the use of promising?I have promised, a hundred times,but never returned. Wherever we goour cause is the same:to make a living and raise children.If a poem arises, it’s merelyan accidental blessing. For several hours my heart ached,but I woke up—smiling. |  Ha Jin - 1996 |