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 ground  And dreams in the sky,    Hoping that, someday, the roots of one  Will 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, crying  The awful boredom of observation, the unending  Hours of afternoon empty to a creature  Of smell and chase. His poor eyes see shadows  Pass below; they are unsatisfactory.  Voices come from nowhere. They do not hear him.  Why does he live? He tries to howl but sound  Flattens in a bred-thin throat. Whoever owns him  Consigns him to nothing when they go away.  Across the street, I hear the constant sound of nothing  Lashing him. He gives up, then gives up  Giving up, and cries again. Desire  Won't let him alone: to be with the world  Beyond him, to move among things and creatures,  To be where we are passing and meeting. But he is not  One of us; it is not his world. He wears a collar  And prances unnaturally along a fence, pressing  The 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 woman  in an enormous beaver coat    standing at the end of the curb  of 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 apartment  with its plastic slip-covered chairs,    the long chain for a toilet flusher,  pocks in the plaster ceiling.    She is my Romanian grandmother  who speaks little English,    but taught me to crochet,    now lost among the broken headstones  of the old gated Jewish cemetery    we passed by that day  after buying our milk and our bread. | | [Judith Harris](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/judith-harris) - 2018 |
| “The Red Wheelbarrow”  so much depends  upon  a red wheel  barrow  glazed with rain  water  beside the white  chickens | | [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 grew  from a crack in the concrete?  Proving nature's law is wrong it  learned 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 concrete  when 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 by  since 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 heart  grinding 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 even  when you have no stomach for it  and everything you’ve held dear  crumbles like burnt paper in your hands,  your throat filled with the silt of it.  When grief sits with you, its tropical heat  thickening the air, heavy as water  more fit for gills than lungs;  when grief weights you down like your own flesh  only more of it, an obesity of grief,  you think, How can a body withstand this?  Then you hold life like a face  between your palms, a plain face,  no charming smile, no violet eyes,  and you say, yes, I will take you  I 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 hogs  Hunted 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 shed  In vain; then even the monsters we defy  Shall 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 kitchen  When company comes,  But I laugh,  And eat well,  And grow strong.  Tomorrow,  I’ll be at the table  When company comes.  Nobody’ll dare  Say to me,  “Eat in the kitchen,”  Then.  Besides,  They’ll see how beautiful I am  And 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 bring  Home from the farm real hay  For the reindeer that didn't exist  And after we were finally asleep  Would get out and take the slabs  Up in his arms and carry them  Back to the bed of his pickup,  Making sure to litter the snow  With chaff so he could show us  In the morning the place where  They'd stood eating, their harness  Bells dulled by the cold, their breath  Steam, 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, while  We wear the mask.  We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  To thee from tortured souls arise.  We sing, but oh the clay is vile  Beneath 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 fourteen  and my skin has betrayed me  the boy I cannot live without  still sucks his thumb  in secret  how come my knees are  always so ashy  what if I die  before morning  and 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 finally  tell the truth about me  There is nothing I want to do  and too much  that has to be done  and momma's in the bedroom  with the door closed.  Nobody even stops to think  about my side of it  I should have been on Math Team  my marks were better than his  why do I have to be  the one  wearing braces  I have nothing to wear tomorrow  will I live long enough  to grow up  and momma's in the bedroom  with the door closed. | | Audre Lorde - 1978 |
| “Napoleon”  Children, when was  Napoleon 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 did  Napoleon Bonaparte do,  asks teacher.  Won a war, the children say.  Lost a war, the children say.  No one knows.  Our butcher had a dog  called Napoleon,  says Frantisek.  The butcher used to beat him and the dog died  of hunger  a year ago.  And all the children are now sorry  for Napoleon. | | Miroslav Holub - 1956 |
| “Taking One for the Team”  We practiced together,  sweat and stained.  We pummeled each other  and 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 score  was less last night,  we're walking tall.  Our team came through  and stuck together like Crazy Glue.  I'm proud to say  I lost with you. | | Sara Holbrook - 2011 |
| “Learning to love America”  because it has no pure products  because the Pacific Ocean sweeps along the coastline  because the water of the ocean is cold  and because land is better than ocean  because I say we rather than they  because I live in California  I have eaten fresh artichokes  and jacaranda bloom in April and May  because my senses have caught up with my body  my breath with the air it swallows  my hunger with my mouth  because I walk barefoot in my house  because I have nursed my son at my breast  because he is a strong American boy  because I have seen his eyes redden when he is asked who he is  because he answers I don’t know  because to have a son is to have a country  because my son will bury me here  because countries are in our blood and we bleed them  because it is late and too late to change my mind  because 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 Everest  Or how many times Byron goes into Texas,  Or whether the law of the excluded middle  Applies west of the Rockies. For these  And the like reasons, you have to go to school  And study books and listen to what you are told,  And sometimes try to remember. Though I don’t know  What you will do with the mean annual rainfall  On Plato’s Republic, or the calorie content  Of the Diet of Worms, such things are said to be  Good for you, and you will have to learn them  In order to become one of the grown-ups  Who sees invisible things neither steadily nor whole,  But keeps gravely the grand confusion of the world  Under 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 coat  when winter comes to cover you,  or like a pair of thick socks  the cold cannot bite through,                           I love you,  I have nothing else to give you,  so it is a pot full of yellow corn  to warm your belly in winter,  it is a scarf for your head, to wear  over your hair, to tie up around your face,                           I love you,  Keep it, treasure this as you would  if 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 hogan  in 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 outside  no 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 place  where 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 enough  to let your friends down.    Yesterday afternoon I met Pham,  a Vietnamese man who was once a general.  He came to this country  after nine years’ imprisonment.  Now he works hard as a custodian  and always avoids  meeting his former soldiers here,  because every one of them  is doing better than he is.  “Sadness,” he told me,  “is a luxury for me.  I have no time for it.  If I feel sad  I won’t be able to support my family.”    His words filled me with shame,  although I learned long ago  a busy bee feels no sorrow.  He made me realize I’m still a fortunate one  and ought to be happy and grateful  for having food in my stomach  and books to read.  I returned home humming a cheerful tune.  My wife smiled wondering  why I had suddenly become lighthearted.  My son followed me, laughing and frolicking,  while I was capering on the floor.    Last night  I went to a party in my dream.  Voices and laughter were drifting in a large hall  that was full of paintings and calligraphy.  Strolling with ease  I ran into the handwriting of yours  hung in the air  piece by piece waving like wings.  Dumbfounded, I turned  and saw you sitting on a chair,  motionless, the same lean detached face,  only your blue clothes had grown darker.  Something snapped in my chest  and my tears flowed.  What’s the use of promising?  I have promised, a hundred times,  but never returned. Wherever we go  our cause is the same:  to make a living and raise children.  If a poem arises, it’s merely  an accidental blessing.    For several hours my heart ached,  but I woke up—smiling. | Ha Jin - 1996 | |