



Poems to Learn by Heart

CLASSICAL COLLECTION



- 1. CHOOSE A POEM**
- 2. LEARN IT BY HEART**
- 3. PERFORM IT OUT LOUD**

Poems to learn for Poetry by Heart

CHOOSE 1 Pre 1914 and 1 Post 1914

Pre 1914

Ye Spotted Snakes by William Shakespeare (1595)

From a Midsummer Night's Dream

Ye spotted snakes with double tongue,
Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen;
Newts and blindworms, do no wrong,
Come not near our fairy Queen.

Philomele, with melody
Sing in our sweet lullaby;
Lulla, lulla, lullaby, lulla, lulla, lullaby:
Never harm
Nor spell nor charm,
Come our lovely lady nigh;
So, good night, with lullaby.

Weaving spiders, come not here;
Hence, you long-legged spinners, hence!
Beetles black, approach not near;
Worm nor snail, do no offence.

Philomele, with melody
Sing in our sweet lullaby;
Lulla, lulla, lullaby, lulla, lulla, lullaby:
Never harm
Nor spell nor charm,
Come our lovely lady nigh;
So, good night, with lullaby.

For Want of a Nail Anonymous (1629)

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost;
For want of a shoe, the horse was lost;
For want of a horse, the rider was lost;
For want of a rider, the battle was lost;
For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost,
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

Written in March (1798)

By William Wordsworth

The cock is crowing,
The stream is flowing,
The small birds twitter,
The lake doth glitter,
The green field sleeps in the sun;
The oldest and youngest
Are at work with the strongest;
The cattle are grazing,
Their heads never raising;
There are forty feeding like one!

Like an army defeated
The snow hath retreated,
And now doth fare ill
On the top of the bare hill;
The Ploughboy is whooping-anon-anon:
There's joy in the mountains;
There's life in the fountains;
Small clouds are sailing,
Blue sky prevailing;
The rain is over and gone!

Answer To A Child's Question (1802)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Do you ask what the birds say? The sparrow, the dove,
The linnet and thrush say, 'I love and I love!'
In the winter they're silent – the wind is so strong;
What it says, I don't know, but it sings a loud song.
But green leaves, and blossoms, and sunny warm weather,
And singing, and loving – all come back together.
But the lark is so brimful of gladness and love,
The green fields below him, the blue sky above,
That he sings, and he sings; and forever sings he –
'I love my Love, and my Love loves me!'

The North Wind (1805) anonymous (1805)

This poem has five verses. You may choose to recite one, some or all of them.

The north wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow,
And what will the robin do then, Poor thing?
He'll sit in a barn,
And keep himself warm,
And hide his head under his wing, Poor thing!

The north wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow,
And what will the swallow do then, Poor thing?
Oh, do you not know
That he's off long ago,
To a country where he will find spring, Poor thing!

The north wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow,
And what will the dormouse do then, Poor thing?
Roll'd up like a ball
In his nest snug and small
He'll sleep till warm weather comes in, Poor thing!

The north wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow,
And what will the honey-bee do then, Poor thing?
In his hive he will stay
Till the cold is away
And then he'll come out in the spring, Poor thing!

The Star (1806)

By Jane Taylor

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are !
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night.

Then the trav'ler in the dark,
Thanks you for your tiny spark,
He could not see which way to go,
If you did not twinkle so.

In the dark blue sky you keep,
And often thro' my curtains peep,
For you never shut your eye,
Till the sun is in the sky.

'Tis your bright and tiny spark,
Lights the trav'ler in the dark :
Tho' I know not what you are,
Twinkle, twinkle, little star.

Robert Browning **from The Pied Piper of** **Hamelin (1842)**

Into the street the Piper stept,
Smiling first a little smile,
As if he knew what magic slept
In his quiet pipe the while;
Then, like a musical adept,
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled
Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;
And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
You heard as if an army muttered;
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty
rumbling;
And out of the houses the rats came
tumbling.
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
Families by tens and dozens,
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives –
Followed the Piper for their lives.
From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed dancing,
Until they came to the river Weser
Wherein all plunged and perished!
– Save one who, stout as Julius Caesar,
Swam across and lived to carry
(As he, the manuscript he cherished)
To Rat-land home his commentary:
Which was, 'At the first shrill notes of the
pipe,
I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,
And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
Into a cider-press's gripe:
And a moving away of pickle-tub boards,
And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
And a drawing the corks of train-oil flasks,
And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks;
And it seemed as if a voice
(Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery
Is breathed) called out, Oh rats, rejoice!

The world is grown to one vast dry-saltery!
So, munch on, crunch on, take
your nuncheon,
Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!
And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,
All ready staved, like a great sun shone
Glorious scarce an inch before me,
Just as methought it said, Come, bore me!
– I found the Weser rolling o'er me.'

You should have heard the Hamelin people
Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
'Go,' cried the Mayor, 'and get long poles!
Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
Consult with carpenters and builders,
And leave in our town not even a trace
Of the rats!' – when suddenly, up the face
Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
With a 'First, if you please, my thousand
guilders!'

The Owl (1842) **By Alfred Tennyson**

When cats run home and light is come,
And dew is cold upon the ground,
And the far-off stream is dumb,
And the whirring sail goes round,
And the whirring sail goes round;
Alone and warming his five wits,
The white owl in the belfry sits.

When merry milkmaids click the latch,
And rarely smells the new-mown hay,
And the cock hath sung beneath the thatch
Twice or thrice his roundelay,
Twice or thrice his roundelay;
Alone and warming his five wits,
The white owl in the belfry sits.

The Eagle (1851) **By Alfred Tennyson**

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

At The Zoo (1861) **By William Makepeace Thackeray**

Adapted solo version:

First I saw the white bear, then I saw the black,
Then I saw the camel with a hump upon his back;
Then I saw the grey wolf, with mutton in his maw;
Then I saw the wombat waddle in the straw;
Then I saw the elephant with his waving trunk,
Then I saw the monkeys—mercy, how
unpleasantly they-smelt!

The Mock Turtle's Song (1871) **Lewis Carroll**

"Will you walk a little faster?" said a whiting to
a snail.

"There's a porpoise close behind us, and he's
treading on my tail.

See how eagerly the lobsters and the turtles
all advance!

They are waiting on the shingle — will you
come and join the dance?

Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will
you join the dance?

Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't
you join the dance?

"You can really have no notion how delightful
it will be,

When they take us up and throw us, with the
lobsters, out to sea!"

But the snail replied "Too far, too far!" and
gave a look askance—

Said he thanked the whiting kindly, but he
would not join the dance.

Would not, could not, would not, could not,
would not join the dance.

Would not, could not, would not, could not,
could not join the dance.

"What matters it how far we go?" his scaly
friend replied.

"There is another shore, you know, upon the
other side.

The further off from England the nearer is to
France—

Then turn not pale, beloved snail, but come
and join the dance?

Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't
you join the dance?

Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't
you join the dance?"

An emerald is as green as grass (1872) **Christina Rossetti**

An emerald is as green as grass;

A ruby red as blood;

A sapphire shines as blue as heaven;

A flint lies in the mud.

A diamond is a brilliant stone,

To catch the world's desire;

An opal holds a fiery spark;

But a flint holds fire.

The Owl and the Pussy-Cat (1872) **By Edward Lear**

I
The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat,
They took some honey, and plenty of money,
Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
And sang to a small guitar,
"O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are,
You are,
You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!"

II
Pussy said to the Owl, "You elegant fowl!
How charmingly sweet you sing!
O let us be married! too long we have tarried:
But what shall we do for a ring?"
They sailed away, for a year and a day,
To the land where the Bong-Tree grows
And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood
With a ring at the end of his nose,
His nose,
His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.

III
"Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for
one shilling
Your ring?" Said the Piggy, "I will."
So they took it away, and were married next
day
By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced by the light of the moon,
The moon,
The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.

Who Has Seen The Wind? (1872) **By Christina Rossetti**

Who has seen the wind?
Neither I nor you:
But when the leaves hang trembling,
The wind is passing through.

Who has seen the wind?
Neither you nor I:
But when the trees bow down their heads,
The wind is passing by.

The Sleepy Giant (1885) **By Charles E. Carryl**

My age is three hundred and seventy-two,
And I think, with the deepest regret,
How I used to pick up and voraciously chew
The dear little boys whom I met.

I've eaten them raw, in their holiday suits;
I've eaten them curried with rice;
I've eaten them baked, in their jackets and
boots,
And found them exceedingly nice.

But now that my jaws are too weak for such
fare,
I think it exceedingly rude
To do such a thing, when I'm quite well aware
Little boys do not like to be chewed.

And so I contentedly live upon eels,
And try to do nothing amiss.
And I pass all the time I can spare from my
meals
In innocent slumber like this.

The Moon (1885)
By Robert Louis Stevenson

The moon has a face like the clock in the hall;
She shines on thieves on the garden wall,
On streets and fields and harbour quays,
And birdies asleep in the forks of the trees.

The squalling cat and the squeaking mouse,
The howling dog by the door of the house,
The bat that lies in bed at noon,
All love to be out by the light of the moon.

But all of the things that belong to the day
Cuddle to sleep to be out of her way;
And flowers and children close their eyes
Till up in the morning the sun shall arise.

From A Railway Carriage (1885)
By Robert Louis Stevenson

Faster than fairies, faster than witches,
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;
And charging along like troops in a battle,
All through the meadows the horses and cattle:
All of the sights of the hill and the plain
Fly as thick as driving rain;
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,
Painted stations whistle by.

Here is a child who clambers and scrambles,
All by himself and gathering brambles;
Here is a tramp who stands and gazes;
And there is the green for stringing the daisies!
Here is a cart run away in the road
Lumping along with man and load;
And here is a mill and there is a river:
Each a glimpse and gone for ever!

Windy Nights (1885)
By Robert Louis Stevenson

Whenever the moon and stars are set,
Whenever the wind is high,
All night long in the dark and wet,
A man goes riding by.
Late in the night when the fires are out,
Why does he gallop and gallop about?

Whenever the trees are crying aloud,
And ships are tossed at sea,
By, on the highway, low and loud,
By at the gallop goes he.
By at the gallop he goes, and then
By he comes back at the gallop again.

Bed In Summer (1885)
By Robert Louis Stevenson

In winter I get up at night
And dress by yellow candle-light.
In summer, quite the other way,
I have to go to bed by day.

I have to go to bed and see
The birds still hopping on the tree,
Or hear the grown-up people's feet
Still going past me in the street.

And does it not seem hard to you,
When all the sky is clear and blue,
And I should like so much to play,
To have to go to bed by day?

The Elf and The Dormouse (1894)

Oliver Hereford

Under a toadstool crept a wee Elf,
Out of the rain to shelter himself.

Under the toadstool, sound asleep,
Sat a big Dormouse all in a heap.

Trembled the wee Elf, frightened and yet
Fearing to fly away lest he get wet.

To the next shelter—maybe a mile!
Sudden the wee Elf smiled a wee smile.

Tugged till the toadstool toppled in two.
Holding it over him, gaily he flew.

Soon he was safe home, dry as could be.
Soon woke the Dormouse—"Good gracious me!

"Where is my toadstool?" loud he lamented.
—And that's how umbrellas first were invented.

Some One (1913)

Walter De La Mare

Some one came knocking
At my wee, small door;
Some one came knocking,
I'm sure—sure—sure;
I listened, I opened,
I looked to left and right,
But nought there was a-stirring
In the still dark night;
Only the busy beetle
Tap-tapping in the wall,
Only from the forest
The screech-owl's call,
Only the cricket whistling
While the dewdrops fall,
So I know not who came knocking,
At all, at all, at all.

Post 1914

The Little Turtle (1920)

Vachel Lindsay

There was a little turtle.
He lived in a box.
He swam in a puddle.
He climbed on the rocks.

He snapped at a mosquito.
He snapped at a flea.
He snapped at a minnow.
And he snapped at me.

He caught the mosquito.
He caught the flea.
He caught the minnow.
But he didn't catch me.

Elelephony (1930)

Laura Richards

Once there was an elephant,
Who tried to use the telephant.
No! No! I mean an elephone
Who tried to use the telephone.

(Dear me! I am not certain quite
That even now I've got it right.)
Howe'er it was, he got his trunk
Entangled in the telephunk.

The more he tried to get it free,
The louder buzzed the telephee.
(I fear I'd better drop the song
Of elephop and telephong!)

The Door (1962)
By Miroslav Holub

Go and open the door.
Maybe outside there's
a tree, or a wood,
a garden,
or a magic city.

Go and open the door.
Maybe a dog's rummaging.
Maybe you'll see a face,
or an eye,
or the picture
of a picture.

Go and open the door.
If there's a fog
it will clear.

Go and open the door.
Even if there's only
the darkness ticking,
even if there's only
the hollow wind,
even if
nothing
is there,
go and open the door.

At least
there'll be
a draught.

**Instructions For Growing
Poetry (1998)**
By Tony Mitton

Shut your eyes.
Open your mind.
Look inside.
What do you find?
Something funny?
Something sad?
Something beautiful,
mysterious, mad?
Open your ears.
Listen well.
A word or phrase
begins to swell?
Catch its rhythm,
hold its sound.
Gently, slowly
roll it round.
Does it please you?
Does it tease you?
Does it ask
to grow and spread?
Now those little
words are sprouting
poetry
inside your head.

Granny Is (2000)
Valerie Bloom

Granny is
fried dumplin' an' run-dung,
coconut drops an' grater cake,
fresh ground coffee smell in the mornin'
when we wake.

Granny is
loadin' up the donkey,
basket full on market day
with fresh snapper the fisherman bring back
from the bay.

Granny is
clothes washin' in the river
scrubbin' dirt out on the stone
haulin' crayfish an' eel from the water
on her own.

Granny is
stories in the moonlight
underneath the guangu tree
and a spider web of magic
all round we.

Granny say,
'Only de best fe de gran'children,
it don' matter what de price,
don't want no one pointin' finger.'

Granny nice.

Isn't My Name Magical? (2004)
By James Berry

Nobody can see my name on me.
My name is inside
and all over me, unseen
like other people also keep it.
Isn't my name magical?

My name is mine only.
It tells me I am individual,
the one special person it shakes
when I'm wanted.

Even if someone else answers
for me, my message hangs in the air
haunting others, till it stops
with me, the right name.
Isn't your name and my name magic?

If I'm with hundreds of people
and my name gets called,
my sound switches me on to answer
like it was my human electricity.

My name echoes across the playground,
it comes, it demands my attention,
I have to find out who calls,
who wants me for what.
My name gets blurted out in class,
it is terror, at a bad time,
because somebody is cross.

My name gets called in a whisper,
I am happy, because
my name may have touched me
with a loving voice.
Isn't your name and my name magic?