

Student Poems Inspired by

Taking Off Emily Dickinson's Clothes by Billy Collins



“Undressing” (or Whatever) a Poet

This assignment asks students to “undress” their poet as Billy Collins does in his poem, “Taking Off Emily Dickinson’s Clothes.” In that poem, Collins uses the suggestive metaphor as an extended metaphor for getting to know a poet well, i.e. to get intimate with a poet. After I read the poem aloud as provocatively as I can, I tease them about how they must have misunderstood Billy, since he has such respect for Emily, he would never really undress her in public, but...

As a culminating activity for their own Poet Research Project, I ask students to write a similar poem to express their own familiarity with their poet. I suggest that the best poems will reference works by the poet and might even go so far as to imitate the style of their poet as an homage.

I require them to submit a digital version of the poem, as well as an illustrated print copy, and to present the poem aloud to the class. Then I run off all the poems and bind them in a class anthology that the librarian catalogues and keeps for future reference. Following you will find the title page for a student anthology of poems inspired by the assignment and the handout itself, based on a page on my website from the Poem-a-Day links for National Poetry Month.

from MsEffie’s LifeSavers Poem-a-Day National Poetry Month Assignments
<http://homepage.mac.com/mseffie/assignments/poem-a-day/daily.html>

The Poet Research Project can also be found on my website –

http://homepage.mac.com/mseffie/assignments/research_paper/sophomorepaper.html

Though more appropriate to Literature than Language, Collins’s poem is a great one to approach rhetorically, because of its humor and style.

Taking Off Emily Dickinson's Clothes by Billy Collins

First, her tippet made of tulle,
easily lifted off her shoulders and laid
on the back of a wooden chair.

5 And her bonnet,
the bow undone with a light forward pull.

Then the long white dress, a more
complicated matter with mother-of-pearl
buttons down the back,
10 so tiny and numerous that it takes forever
before my hands can part the fabric,
like a swimmer's dividing water,
and slip inside.

You will want to know
that she was standing
15 by an open window in an upstairs bedroom,
motionless, a little wide-eyed,
looking out at the orchard below,
the white dress puddled at her feet
on the wide-board, hardwood floor.

20 The complexity of women's undergarments
in nineteenth-century America
is not to be waved off,
and I proceeded like a polar explorer
through clips, clasps, and moorings,
25 catches, straps, and whalebone stays,
sailing toward the iceberg of her nakedness.

Later, I wrote in a notebook
it was like riding a swan into the night,
but, of course, I cannot tell you everything--
30 the way she closed her eyes to the orchard,
how her hair tumbled free of its pins,
how there were sudden dashes
whenever we spoke.

What I can tell you is
35 it was terribly quiet in Amherst
that Sabbath afternoon,
nothing but a carriage passing the house,
a fly buzzing in a windowpane.

40 So I could plainly hear her inhale
when I undid the very top
hook-and-eye fastener of her corset

and I could hear her sigh when finally it was unloosed,
the way some readers sigh when they realize
45 that Hope has feathers,
that reason is a plank,
that life is a loaded gun
that looks right at you with a yellow eye.



Your Turn: It's your turn to get intimate with a poet. Pick someone whose poetry inspires you and "undress" them. Or dress them, or take them for a walk, have tea, go shopping – whatever metaphor works best for getting to know your poet.

Undressing Poets Project

Bishop McGuinness Catholic High School 2010

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A Walk with Ms. Alexander*

by Grace Castillo

After dinner we like to take a walk.
We step outside into the dusk
And fill our lungs with summer's air.
The sky is turning from blue to orange to purple,
Entertaining our wandering eyes.
I feel the grass beneath my feet
And the breeze flowing through my hair.
We walk from my house
And into the open field that you can see from miles around.
Surrounding the field is a small fence.
I sit on top of it and look around.
There we stop to talk,
Talk about the day,
About the night,
About the sky.
We talk about our past,
About our dreams
Of who we will become,
What is hidden behind our eyes.
There are stories to be told --
The open field behind my house
Knows everything about us,
And if wild flowers could talk, I suspect
They could hold conversations with us
And tell us what they think.
We walk in the field, sit upon the fence,
Feeling the night come down upon us.
This is how I have come to know,
Ms. Alexander

*Elizabeth Alexander

Dancing with Maya Angelou

by Allie Dodson

She walks into the studio,
And I am instantly intimidated.
This phenomenal, strong, and cultured woman...
Teaching me how to dance.

She takes off her shawl,
And her strong shoulders are revealed.
She stands strong, her shoulders back.
Her head is held high, and she looks infinite.

She opens her mouth to cue the music, her voice was so kind.
But I could hear the sternness that lies under her tongue.
Her eyes look over at me, shaking in her presence,
“Don’t be nervous. Just be free.”
Ah, making a reference to her work. She stays true to her word.

The strong beats of a drum come upon the speakers.
Maya walks to middle of the studio.
She starts to sway, side to side, and as the beat goes faster,
Her feet pat the ground.
Her eyes flutter, and her feet beat harder, and her hands move,
All with passionate rage.

She asks me to join her.
Maya Angelou, including me in her dance...
She tells a story with the emotions in her moves.
Her lips hushed by the loud pum-bum-buhdundundun of the drums.
She danced. I danced. We danced.

Dressing Maya Angelou

by Katie Boecking

Your body so intricate,
Your skin so bare,
Put on a skirt,
Cover up those swinging hips.
Put on a blouse,
Cover up your heart,
Half of stone and half of gushy love.
Put on a jacket,
Cover up your backbone,
Your independence is too much for some to see.
Put on some gloves,
Cover up your hands,
Restrict your hold to those who read your work.
Put on some shoes,
Cover up your feet.
Lest you trample on another poor man's heart.
Put on a hat,
Cover up your head,
Keep your head from getting in the clouds,
Put on some clothes,
Cover up yourself.
Your words so harsh yet so loving,
Petting yet slapping,
A hug, but also a stab,
Chain your words down,
Keep them under control.
But no matter how many clothes you put on,
Still you rise.

At a Doctor's Appointment with Elizabeth Bishop
by Hannah Govett

*Elizabeth sits in the Waiting Room
With her Aunt Consuelo.
She quietly sits in the gloom
Writing of an armadillo.*

*The armadillo had been out
The night before.
Elizabeth saw his snout
Glistening as bright as the Florida shore.*

*Flipping through a book,
She sits next to her aunt.
At the pictures she loves to look
And wants to write, but can't.*

*Elizabeth's past has made her sad;
She has lost so much.
When she lost her dad
She lost her poet's touch.*

*One could say she's a master
Of the art of losing.
She remembers the disasters
As she waits for the doctor, snoozing.*

At the Coffeehouse with Gwendolyn Brooks by Andrew Head

**It's down the street,
Behind the barber shop.
They both raise their voices to prove a point.**

**Grandfather Marcus speaks of a time,
Gwendolyn speaks of their time.**

**They wouldn't listen if she wasn't so whimsical,
They wouldn't listen if she didn't speak so plain.
They wouldn't listen if she wasn't so serious.**

And trust me, she knows what she's talking about.

Words with Brooks

by Zach Barreto

Hey sister Brooks how you doing

I'm reading your poems and they're dang confusing

The points you make are so fly and amazing

When you walk by people stop what they doing

Because your blackness is just so pure and white

Hey that's a contradiction walking and talking

So you're an example to all what we need to be

Luminously discreet and complete and continuous

Your poems put us high in space, but the message you tell us

Grounds us down to this living place

So with much love rest in peace

A Carriage Ride in Italy with Elizabeth Barrett Browning

by Margo Borders

Through the streets of Italy,
Shaking and rattling
on the stony streets,
We make our way in the city.

Robert sits beside her,
Her head rests on his shoulder.
With little whispers and smiles,
Their love evident in many ways.

Like the golden orb of a perfect song,
They speak with a joyous tone.
He tells stories, making her laugh,
Sweet like music.

She tells me of her letters,
All dead paper,
And of a courtship that inspired
Her entire life's work.

When the carriage stops,
The face of all the world seems changed.
Never have I seen such happiness,
Love to the depth of the soul.

Meeting Elizabeth Barrett Browning

by Lizzy Schrantz

I saw her, her face full of remorse and distain.
I tried to catch her eye, hoping she would explain.
Locked up inside, I watched her open a notebook.
The entire time she sat there, I wished for one look.

Finally she glanced up and looked at my face.
I sat there, wanting to give her a warm embrace.
Her eyes glistening, full of deep sorrow.
Oh, how I wish I could see her for the rest of my tomorrows.

As I gathered the courage to approach her,
She slowly got up and my mind went a blur.
Searching for memories of death,
I fought the feelings inside of me, holding my breath.

Her somber face looked at mine
And I couldn't remember the last time I was actually fine.
With my life, one word to her could change my luck.
I felt the need to run to her; I was indeed star-struck.

As she walked closer, I could feel the walls closing around me.
Would this be? Could this be?
The moment I looked inside her soul
She smiled at me and said "Hello,"
And I finally got to peer into the life of
Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Car Ride with Buck* **by Donovan Moisant**

Sitting there, alone in my car,
I waited outside, the snow gliding down the windows,
Waiting for my friend, inside that bar
To come to sit in the passenger seat,
And tell me a story.

You see, my school had asked us to entertain nursing home residents,
So they gave me a guy named Charlie, who told me to call him Buck.
He came to me with a bribe, asking for an escape from those walls.
How could I refuse? Besides, it couldn't be that bad.

He told me he had a lover he would always yearn for,
And that this lover kept him company in life, in bed.
He wanted to be with her, at least once more,
So I helped him into my car and shut the door.

We went to see her, but they wouldn't let me in.
"This'll just take a moment, I'll see you in ten."
Hours later, he came back from his affair.

I asked where I should go.
He said, with a grin, that I should never know,
That a bluebird would guide me
As long as I chose to not ignore it, much unlike himself.

"Always listen for its song
Because in times of decisions, its song grows the loudest.
The lyrics are scary, but that's not the right word. Daunting.
Yes, daunting. It's easier to listen to the crow."

"The crow?"

"Right. It lives on the other side of the bluebird's tree.
Its song is similar, but the lyrics aren't pretty.
Its song is sometimes louder than the bluebird's
But never, ever listen to it."

His lover was gone now. I dropped him off.
He walked to his room, with the bed for one.

"Or you'll end up like me, with a love that never stays."

***Charles Bukowski**

Contents of Lewis Carroll's Coat by Kennedy Goetzinger

Slowly he walked towards me
Setting his long trench coat on the back of the chair
Something falling on the floor
That I recognized as some sort of drugs.
He said "Alice, let's take a look in my coat."
Alice? I thought, that's not my name,
But I walked over to where his coat was lying,
Stuck my hand inside what seemed like an endless pocket.
I pulled a small piece of paper out,
Unrecognizable math equations is all I saw.
Quickly I dismissed the paper,
But as it landed on its back
I saw the five cartoon girls drawn on the back.
I was curious, but I didn't ask about it.
I figured it was something personal.
I reached in again and pulled out a camera.
I turned it on and quickly turned it off
As I was disturbed at what I saw.
I heard him chortling "Alice" in the background.
So confusing this is, I thought.
I opened up his jacket
And saw the lining, full of colorful intriguing designs
Strange clams, animals -- including walruses -- a cat, psychedelic patterns,
Even a picture of a naked girl or two.
After seeing all the things in this man's coat,
I'm not sure I want to get to know him anymore.

Into Wonderland with Lewis Carroll

by Katie Hogsett

I skipped about and on my way
A sight did start to appear,
A funny man dressed in a suit
Staring into a mirror.

He turned around & said to me
A quite peculiar thing,
"Through this looking glass my friend,
A place that's fit for kings."

"Some could call it paradise,
Or maybe where confusion reigns.
Me, I call it wonderland
Because madness it attains."

"It's not a beach with oysters,
Or a fight with the Jabberwock
It's a little piece of nothingness,
But everything does it mock."

"Would you call it nonsense?" I asked
And a smile engulfed his face.
"You'll just have to see for yourself."
And suddenly we appeared in this place.

A large caterpillar, lungs filled with smoke,
Plumply sat far ahead,
A rabbit checking his pocket watch
As a queen yelled "Off with his head!"

"Where did this all come from?" said I
"Oh, imagination I do suppose,
But more of a collaboration of minds
With little girls decorated in bows."

"Have you heard what people say?
Of how this all came to be?"
"Oh, yes, the hallucinogens," he replied.
"But no, those would never be for me"

“Then how?” I asked, confused as I was,
“Did you think of such weird stuff?”
“Well”, he said, “Experiences, my dear,
Mixed with innocence was just enough.”

“I’ve seen through eyes of uncorrupted minds,
A factor often overlooked,
Mixed with geometrics and logic alike.
Throw it together and this place was cooked.”

“Of course!” I replied
“I fear they forget, the education you did endure.”
“Yes, and they’ll believe what they want,
But now only you can be sure”

“I enjoyed this, I did, but now it is time
It has seemed like it’s been days,
These swirls are giving me a headache,
And the smoking caterpillar has put me in a haze.”

“Thank you for coming, and
As you leave, remember just one thing,
You’re slightly madder then you were before,
And just follow the sound of a ding.”

A Hamburger with Billy Collins

by Maddie Reddick

The picnic table was worn
from the rays of the beating sun,
which lit his face,
smiling from beneath those dark eyes.

You should know
the hamburger was delicious,
or should I say cheeseburger
with ketchup, mayonnaise, mustard, lettuce, and tomato.

He cooked them himself,
just for us,
with no special ingredients or tricks,
yet it was the best burger
I had ever tasted.

The twinkle in his eye
sparkled like a jewel,
as he laughed
that whole-hearted laugh
at the not-so-funny jokes the children told.

He held them in his arms,
looking as if he never wanted to let them go.

Looking up at the blue sky,
I sniffed,
smelling the pine-scented air
just as he caught my eye,
smiling that sly smile as if to say,
“Shh, keep the secret.”

He winked at me and whispered,
“There is just no way you are the pine-scented air.”

At the Races with Billy Collins

by Joe Webber

One day,
An ordinary day,
On a day like today,
We went to the Races.
We took our seats,
Hot from the sun,
Sticky with the gum
Of their last occupants.
I asked Billy,
"Who do you think will win?"
He didn't answer,
Merely staring inquisitively at the racers.
Cheering, booing,
Red, blue and white,
Several minutes passed
At the Races.
Finally, the racers lined up
In their narrow, white cells,
Panting and stamping
Madly before their run.
With burgers and fries
And drinks in hand,
The crowd, myself included,
Awaited the start.
Under his breath,
"That's odd," I heard
From my right,
"Why is there no one else watching?"
I searched
And he was right,
There were only he and I
And a few others besides.
"It's better this way.
Gets crowded usually,"
I said,
Looking back toward the start.
BANG!
They were off,
Rushing and leaping
At the races.
"That's odd,"

Not again!
"There's so many.
Why so many?"
I looked at him,
At his questioning face,
Folded and creased,
Disappointed.
"Too many horses,
And nobody watching.
Why race
If there is no one to see?"
I ignored him
And continued observing,
With my wager
On the white one.

Sitting on a Park Bench with Billy Collins Making Fun of Life

by Armando Melendez

The day was bright, full of nothing to do except for a trip to the park.
Relaxing, I walked down upon the grass feeling solemn, yet bored.
I made my way to a bench, sat down, and began to watch life unfold.
I remained alone until an older man sat next to me upon that bench.

His name was Billy and he was as lively as can be.
I explained to him how my day was a bore, with nothing to do.
Billy laughed, rolled his eyes, and bluntly told me I'm wrong.
"Look out at life," he said, "The view in front of you is a comedy."

We both watched carefully as he told me to have patience.
Just then a man rode his bike into a tree, paying no attention.
Billy pointed and laughed, luckily the man was okay, and I laughed too.
Miraculously, events began to unfold, life transforming into a sitcom.

A woman opened a previously shaken soda, a roller-blader forgot how to brake,
A football hit a man too low, and an overweight person broke a swing.
A car tried to off-road, popping a tire, the loud noise scared the whole park.
By this point Billy and I were rolling, tears crawling down our faces.

Eventually the laughing died down, though it took quite a while.
Billy told me I had just learned the most important lesson of life.
No day ever gets old, no day is ever boring,
Anything can be interpreted as funny -- it just depends how you look at it

Billy's Backyard

by Grant Martin

Billy gave me the grand tour one day of his home,
and of his grand backyard.
On one end, you can see Smokey the Bear
prowling and looking for troublemakers,
to show 'em how it's done.
On another end, you can see a pool with a corpse
on the bottom to show the art of drowning.
On another, he points out a home owned by a man
struggling with forgetfulness.
And what he describes as the best,
an open window on a house quite close to his,
where he can watch and fantasize
about undressing Emily Dickinson
from the view of his own bedroom.

Undressing Stephen Crane

by Brandon Ngo

People wear masks of smiles
Crane chooses not to
He doesn't care if you judge him
There are more important things on his mind

Crane has simple clothing
He wears simple shirts and slacks
It doesn't matter to him
As long as it covers his back

You wouldn't be able to see his scars
Unless you knew him
He's dying every second
Behind those hard eyes are tears
He doesn't believe in fairy tales

He always keeps a pen handy in his pocket
In case he needs to write something

Underneath that cranium is something vast
But not big enough to hold his pain

He's running out of time to change the world
But Crane doesn't waste time
He has several watches on his wrists
His own body isn't worth a dime

People didn't really know Crane
But he couldn't care less
He figured they'd appreciate him more
When his writing lives on
After he's dead

Sunday Mass with Stephen Crane by Hayden Bryan

Who were you when you wrote about the days
Of hardships and beliefs we pass on our way
To everlasting life or just the end of time?
Why did you use so much Imagery and not care to rhyme?

You were young when you left this world and died a faithful man,
At the age of 28, too short of a life span.
The hidden meaning in your writings a challenge to our minds,
Like when you said that war is so often kind

You write about religion and what it means to you.
The writing stands out to the reader as something you can view.
How was it being raised in a house of fourteen?
Publishing articles at the age of only just sixteen?
Your use of realism about a girl on the streets
And the courage of a war and all of its defeats
Startled the viewers as it seemed quite absurd,
But with some time your writing were not unheard.

Although your candle has far burned out,
We continue to understand you without a doubt.
For your insight captivates us in at every verse
And in God you are immersed --

Said the man to the Universe.

painting with e e cummings

by tendai dandajena

painting?

yes painting... i guess i'll go painting with cummings.

he's a cool guy and all,

but when he starts to paint he goes somewhere i have never travelled
sadly beyond.

he paints these ladies, the cambridge ladies,

they look stuck up,

as if they move through dooms of money...

he paints their eyes small small with big heads,

apparently it represents ignorance.

i wonder how the critics will take his painting,

bet they'll smash it until only mister death can see its defunct brush strokes.

maggie and milly and molly and may

are on their way.

darkness already?

i guess it's time to go home and leave e. e. to his paintings.

if they don't get too crazy...

oftenevenican'tunderstandthem.

riding in-a car with e e cummings
by elyse hight

riding in-a car with him
is such a peculiar thing,
this car I don't understand.
He keeps raving and raving about
a simple piece of metal.
It's not that big of a
deal.

he is a very hard man to
understand, himself.
He breaks up his sentences into
fragments that don't make sense when
mashed together and what
not.

it was a nice ride though,
through Divinity Avenue.
he told me wonderful stories of stories
about this one lady of ladies,
he claimed "i carry her heart
with me".

it was quite romantic,
it just kept leading back to
his brand new car.
boy, he loved that
car of a car.

Exploring the Garden with Emily Dickinson

by Emily Borders

As new feet within the garden—
We tiptoe right along—
The flowers in May are
Bold little beauties.

We listen to the robins—
She says she wishes she could fly
So that she could see the sea
And never wonder why.

The sunlight hits our faces
Butterflies flutter—carelessly
The murmur of the bees
The sweet nectar they must need

Sweet voices we hear—
Feathers on the ground—
She looks around in awe
Until the bird is found

A frog croaks in the pond—
She whispers to it quietly—
Don't shout! She says—
As if she were conversing

The dews grew chill—
We tiptoed to the light
To not disturb this little world—
And to leave Emily, to write

Gardening With Emily Dickinson

by Sally Harper

We walked out to her flowering garden,
Set in the backyard of her Amherst cottage.
She worked gently and swiftly
Careful to not dirty her snow, white clothes.
She seldom spoke
Yet her passion for the outdoors was evident in her eyes.
She swayed to the sound of the little birds chirping
And smiled at the bunnies playing.
She heard a fly buzz and followed its path with her eyes.
She focused back on her garden
Planting colorful roses.
The scent of the flowers smelled like spring
And slightly like flowers found in funeral homes.
Her love for her flowers was vivid in her face
Yet she still seemed lonely.
Her focus remained on her life as it is
And the legacy she wished to leave.

A Walk in The Fields With Paul Laurence Dunbar

by Joe Edmonds

Once these fields were full o' masks.
People worked for little pay but you saw their strife fade.
Emancipation was on the rise
And these fields deserted.

I asked him again, what were your thoughts?
His response: you wouldn't understand
For you don't wear the mask!

Yet I showed my compassion and he began to understand.
We walked the fields until we approached the tree,
The tree of emancipation,
The tree that made us free!

As Paul lay above the earth,
He reflected on what used to be.
He thought, maybe, just maybe,
One day he would be completely free.

His parents' struggle was now full center.
He had conquered what many thought impossible.
An education from nothing,
Proves to be something.

Remember that young man,
Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Packing for a Trip to England with T. S. Eliot

by Jessica Brewer

Ready to move to Britain,
We have to prepare our things for packing.
The house must be clean,
We need to go by the bank and get some things finished.

Oh,
And the cat needs to be groomed.
Oh,
Where did that cat even go?

This journey is sincerely long,
It will take pages and pages,
I stack boxes up like piles of words,
Bulging out of their space.

Oh,
Where is that cat?
Oh,
There it is...in the window.

I say goodbye to my students,
They've sharpened like a new pencil.
In fact, that pencil,
It needs to be packed.

A Journey with T. S. Eliot by Meg Sine

Traveling through a waste land,
No one around,
We don't hear a sound.
We journey towards an end or a beginning,
Life passes slowly and quickly all at once.
Discussion is flowing, engaging, and deep.
Religion is debatable for him but not for me.
We journey in the dark, searching for the light,
A journey he began long ago.
Happy for a companion he explains
His poetry and deeper meanings,
Everything is falling in place for me,
As we walk slowly in a waste land.

Tea and Cigars with T. S. Eliot by Chip Daniel

"Ello, Cherio!" said this American man.
He walked with tea and cigar in hand.
What a windy night
We had last night!
My cat named Gus
Made quite the fuss.
Then he said something in a language, which I did not know.
Perhaps his Harvard was beginning to show.
Then he talked of his lady in red,
And slowly left as his cigar became dead.

Tea with Eliot

by Molly Kalk

Sitting across from me,
Alternating between sipping tea
And puffing on his pipe,
All the while, absent-mindedly
Petting a ginger cat.

With his deep blue jacket,
His neatly tied black tie,
His legs crossed in freshly pressed trousers,
He pushes his round framed glasses
Up the bridge of his nose.

The essence of sophistication.

The verandah is stylishly decorated,
Matching elegant wicker furniture,
Everything just right.

Statues of cats and nightingales
Are displayed throughout the yard,
All arranged so perfectly
So much so that it takes on a dream-like quality,

When he leans over and asks me,
“One lump, or two?”
And pulls me out of my thought.

The Autumn Trail

by Maddie Farber

Crunching, crunching, crunching,

The leaves crackle and separate into tiny fragments

Underneath our wandering feet.

Down the trail in the forest,

Our spirits soaring,

Waiting for what is to come next,

But just then

The trail splits in two.

Oh where to go? Oh what to do?

Robert says the trail with the leaves that have not been walked upon.

I say the one that has.

Oh what to do? Are Robert and I going to split in two, too?

But it will be an adventure if we are able to crunch the leaves with our own feet he proclaims,

And alas, I am swayed.

Oh, Robert*, you and your ways.

*Robert Frost

Taking A Walk with Robert Frost

by Scott Witcher

Walking through the woods with a friend Robert Frost,
A winding road through which the animals cross,
We had miles to go before the next street,
And miles to go before we sleep.

He told me that in my life I would,
Have to make choices and with those I should
Think before choosing because I would
Want to take both, as if I could.

We came upon two roads inside the wood.
And there I stood, I couldn't move my feet.
He said that if I wish to face defeat
I would take the one that's short and sweet.
But If I decided not to cheat,
I'd have miles to go before I sleep.

Of course, we chose the road less travelled by,
And at the moment the sun had left the sky,
And when nothing but stars shined up high,
I realized the advice he gave was not a lie.

He then told me to always be willing,
To do the uncommon; it is more fulfilling.
That often the unexpected is much more thrilling
Than to only be average, and go through life milling.

At the roads end, we came upon a Christmas tree.
He pointed out the beauty; I had to agree.
Never had I seen happiness right in front of me,
For free, then he said that one day I'll see.

To see good things in life is often so easy,
If I don't go around acting so queasy.
And that knowing this all obstacles I'll handle
Until I sleep, and God says "Out, out brief candle."

Taking a Walk with Robert Frost

by Cody Coyle

Robert and I begin our walk.
It is a walk in the woods about a mile away from his farm.
We first come upon two paths,
We take the different path, the one less traveled.
We come upon wild horses,
Jumping on them we begin to ride.
Both of us want to lead,
But we can just only ride.
It's tragic to think that this beauty can end.
I say probably a forest fire, probably from an accident.
But he says most likely in ice, probably a frost.
This has truly been a special night,
A peck of gold, a gift outright.

Strolling with Robert Frost

by Kendall Morgan

Robert and I
Slowly making our way along
Two paths we must choose between.
Which road not taken
Will he choose?

Fire or ice,
The way our world will end,
Tasting desire leads to favoring fire,
But hate is also known.
Either would suffice.

Into the woods we stare.
A snowy evening is all that I see,
But there is more here.
Dark and deep do these woods seem,
Miles more to go.

The land we possess,
Our land before we were.
Hundreds of years have we been
Living here on this great land,
Living the gift outright.

Live in the moment,
The age-long theme,
Age that saw our lives go by.
We know that life goes on.
Carpe diem.

*Hanging with Hayden**

by Amanda Broussard

*Hayden steps out the door
Ready for his walk,
He starts moving toward me
And begins to talk,*

*We chat about his life and
The memories that he dreads,
Shadows of his childhood,
Floating throughout his head.*

*In the front of her yard
We pass a woman whipping her boy.
We walk farther down the path
To the small pond we enjoy.*

*On the gentle surface
Water lilies float.
Although it's getting late,
We search for a boat.*

*We decide against it
And back home we start to walk,
Although it's almost over
I'll never forget our talk,*

**Robert Hayden*

A Jazz Concert with Langston*

by Stephanie Milligan

He listens to the music,
Snapping his fingers ever so lightly.
His eyes are closed,
Feeling the rhythm.

His eyes are closed,
He's always dreaming
About far off places,
Since the sun ain't always beaming.

Langston looks at me, then back at the band,
A crooked smile on his face.
He seems like a new man.
His eyes seem to gleam with such great delight,
That he's still here
After such a long fight.

He listens to the jazz and catches its beat,
So fresh and clean he begins to tap his feet.
He moves with the rhythm while still dreaming inside,
Though he never moves too much,
It would be improper to try.

As the music winds down,
We say goodbye.
Langston looks back and tells me
"Never let my dreams be denied."

*Langston Hughes

Wake Up Langston*

by William Heitert

Wake up Langston

You have slept through your alarm

You've struck it to stop it from playing the smooth notes of a bass

And now it lies upon the floor

You must defer your dream to realize your dreams

Wake up Langston

Get up and show the world what you are

Not a black poet but a poet

Do not "surrender racial pride in the name of a false integration"

Your soul has grown old, share its wisdom

Wake up! Fling your arms open, feel the sun

A life without dreams is dead, but dreams without a life are no better

WAKE UP!

*Langston Hughes

Singing with Langston Hughes

by Emily Bedford

His guitar strums to the sweet but drowning melodies,
Yet in his mind there is an orchestra playing in the background.
Our minds put together as if to create our own memories,
Through his weary blues swaying to the thick dull pound.
Each time he plays a different type of song,
He reveals another person that relates to it.
Though life is fine, he thinks everything is wrong
And he relies on everything bit by bit—
And having his guitar with him on the run,
So that he will always be himself.
The dreams about walking with the dawn,
All the advice from mother to son—
Keep him writing his soulful songs till dawn.

Dinner With James Joyce

by David Hill

*Small pub on the corner of some street
Sits the man whose thoughts are in his dreams.
This man, well-known to even Yeats, eats alone.
No fare for him but his own land's potatoes;
None care for him, or so he thinks he knows.
He eats slowly, savoring every bite
Even though he just lost a fight.
Inside he walks through fields green,
His hands turning parchment leaves,
His heart with a girl on some long-gone eve.
He turns to me, having seen the staring eyes,
His reflect the protests of his mind
Against himself.*

Tea with John Keats **by Jake Harrell**

As I sat in London Square, drinking my tea,
The young John Keats came up to greet me.
Before he sat down, he waved bye to Fanny;
The loneliness in his eyes a bit uncanny.
I noticed a few things -- he coughed, heavily and much,
And his handshake, not firm, just a soft, weak, touch.
From the late evening sky, a "Bright Star" showed his pale skin,
Luminous, glowing a little, looking much too thin.
Then he looked at me, and slowly began to speak,
"I have fears I may cease to be, for I am getting weak.
Each day I feel my bones continuing to wither.
I know I am the grasshopper, ill prepared for winter."
With that he turned and walked quietly away,
Leaving me and my thoughts in great disarray.

A Walk With Yusef Komunyakaa by Aidan Reap

We set out around seven in the evening
We walked around a canal
The water was clear and pure

He began to speak
His voice deep and strong
He told me of the war and its horrors
His eyes seemed to look
Past my surroundings and me

As he told me of this past he could not forget
The pain could easily be read
From his face and eyes

A strong chilling breath
Whipped over the water and into us
And we hunched our shoulders and closed our coats
He was back again
No longer in a different time

I listened as he told me about his life
Everything was so full of meaning
Both tragedy and victory

He had learned from all of it
He was wise and passionate
All of what he told me had an inner meaning
A lesson for me to hear and learn
And one day pass on to another

We walked around another bend in the canal
And as it was getting late
He hailed a taxi and we went our separate ways
And so I stood thinking of what he had told me
Facing it in all its pain and glory

A Train Ride with Philip Levine by Nathan Smith

On a soaking Saturday in September I sat on a train by Philip Levine.
As we left Detroit he told us about how he lived here and about the smog and his father.
As the train got to the countryside and passed by a field of milkweed he started to laugh.
I have no idea why but he did.
As the night rolled in he was the only one to have a sleepless night.
When I woke up I saw that he was away.
He definitely choose his words well, he would not use one word where none would do.
He told me that he had been to the sea once
and how the clouds above it were beautiful.
He also told me that his mother came over on a boat and used the word mercy a lot.
There was an abandoned factory on the way.
He said that there were a lot of those in Detroit.

A Day Shopping with Edna St. Vincent Millay
by *Francie Trimble*

A day shopping
With a woman named Edna St. Vincent Millay
I tell her "Hey, let's go to the mall!"
"No, No, I have a better place" she says.
"It's an older place you see."
"All sorts of things that we can wear."
So we get to the store,
I walk in, and everything is old-fashioned.
Everything is simple.
Everything is elegant.
I guess maybe that's just her --
Simple, old-fashioned, and elegant.
She was trying on all sorts of clothing
Particularly lace and simple things.

Traveling with Pablo Neruda by Megan Noble

There is no better way in my mind
To better understand a person
Than to travel the world with them
Experience new places and things with them
And talk with them along the way.

Neftali is a seasoned traveler
Spain, Russia, France, Cuba, Mexico, Rangoon, Java
And more
The quiet older man stares off into the distance
As we sit at a café in Paris.

He is quiet
Generally speaking
But not to say that he doesn't use his words
But wisely.
To show this, he quotes, himself, friends, famous authors
And writes, pouring emotions from pen to paper
Mind to matter.

We've moved through Western Europe,
Experienced as much as is proper.
Moving on to Eastern Europe, to Russia
Where he has friends, and many opinions.
Politics, besides poetry, where his words flow freely.

I have learned, experienced, traveled with
A man of figurative and literary genius.
His deep thought and reflection,
Like a clear pond, graced with the floating presence
Of a soft white swan, on a starry night.

Cooking with Sylvia Plath

by Tamara Allen

In order to cook with Miss Plath,
One must understand her temperament.

If she does not speak to you,
Then don't speak to her.
Her mind tends to wander quite easily.

She salts her meals with tears;
An aroma of heartbreak makes its way through the house.

Do not comment on this;
It will only make things worse.
She tries to forget when she can.

The mad girl will cook her meal in silence.
Although her children may scream,
Just background noise.
After the meal is prepared, however,
A beautifully bitter masterpiece shall be consumed by all.

(I regret to inform you, that
Miss Plath is not allowed
To use her oven.
For safety purposes.)

“Wet Towels and Cloths” - Last Days with Sylvia*
by Rachel Rengstorf

I saw you suffering in the cold,
Abandoned and on your own,
You did your best to stay so bold,
For your children, not quite grown.

Third time comes and this is it,
You left bread for the kids,
Knowing this time you would commit,
You open the door, God forbids.

Wet towels and cloths seal the room,
In your mind this plan did plow,
Turn on the gas and let it fume,
There's no turning back now.

The end has come,
You are relieved,
The pain, the feelings now are numb,
Your goal, finally achieved.

We saw your pain,
We saw your guilt,
This time was not to entertain,
You were done, your heart had spilt.

*Sylvia Plath

Breakfast with Sylvia*

by Carrie Carter

She invites me in and the first thing that I notice,
Is her grey cardigan, and green eyelet skirt.
I've noticed that she didn't dress up for me.
She decided that morning not to put on her best dress,
Or her embroidered apron.
Instead she is carrying an old dish towel.

Her kitchen is full of food.
Pancakes and syrup and eggs and
She is slicing strawberries to add to the
Beauty of the breakfast.

Her finger accidentally gets sliced by her knife,
And it really almost seems like she doesn't much care about the pain.
Instead, she is staring at the flap of skin,
She is examining the blood rising to the top of her inner layer of skin,
Her plush, creamy skin.

And I offer her a bandage,
But she politely declines,
And she lets the blood dry.

We sit down by the window,
And she gives us both 3 pancakes,
1 cup of chopped berries,
And, with a swift movement,
She grabs the syrup and pours half the container
Onto her cakes, and I wonder how she stays so thin.

She really seems to enjoy her breakfast,
With all of her being.
I try to get her to talk about her problems with Ted,
Or her poetry,
But she just changes the subject,
In a delightfully warbling voice.

*Sylvia Plath

Hunting With Edgar Allan Poe

by Alex Burnstein

I sat next to him underneath the brush.

We waited for hours and hours for our prey.

The animal never showed up.

We waited for days, months, years.

We grew tired and old as we lay in the shadows of the brush.

Then we saw it, a black raven sitting in a tree.

We took our shots and missed.

It seems as if the raven were sending a message.

The next thing I knew I was in a dark hole,

And next to me was Edgar Allan Poe.

Sippin' with Edgar Allan Poe by Corey Priest

Lookin' at the fence
Where a raven has been lying,
He saw it at a glance,
Sitting outside,
Thinking about anything,
Sippin' to his death,
Not knowing he will become great.
He made an impact
That will always last,
Just sitting outside
With an empty bottle of jack.

Helping Edgar Bury a Man He Killed*

by Derrick Nguyen

Edgar Allan Poe, what a horrible guy.
He was angry with someone and just had to make him die.
Since he's my friend, look at what I have to do --
I have to help bury a dead man that I never even knew.

Edgar Allan Poe, he had a horrible mind.
He chopped up the body's limbs to make it hard to find.
Since he's my friend, look at what I have to do --
He made me turn the body's organs into a hot stew.

Edgar Allan Poe, he had bad taste in humor.
He called the cops and invited them for tea.
Since he's my friend, look at what I have to do --
I offered them "the stew."

Edgar Allan Poe, he snapped.
The guilt and the insanity, he revealed what he had wrapped.
Since he used to be my friend, look at what I have to do --
I ran away.

*Edgar Allan Poe

A Plane Trip with Ezra Pound by Vivian O'Hara

I sit on the plane,
Just like any other,
I see Ezra Pound next to my mother,
And I know that I've gone insane.

He sits with his notebook,
A pen in his hand
And as I try to stand,
He pulls me back down like a hook.

He asks how I'm doin',
If my life's goin' well
I respond, "Just swell,
Would you mind to stop pursuin'?"

He stares at me blankly,
With hurt in his eyes.
I feel his inner cries
And talk with him frankly.

"Ezra, you see,
I'm no man of merit,
I've got quite a demerit
And not worthy to plea."

He responds with sincerity,
"You're perfectly fine!
The confusion on my life is no reason not to shine.
I look at myself, with a sense of no clarity
And wonder how my life has turned out."

A Flight with Rilke*

by Olivia Morris

A flight with Rilke
Parted, from the dust of the earth
I am set free
Limbs lingering about the air
My tender wings unraveled, taut
My poet's eyes laugh
His wings gather light
And flare as they pulse idly
I fight the air and follow
To a hallowed land

Stealing the scent of rose
Lost in the brilliance of the stars
He gently guides my hands
Across the water's blue
Never a word spoken
Yet a thousand meanings shown
The stars hold their sovereignty
Above my wandering eyes
The sun's demise never seen
And yet the moon's rise
Clasped in place

Suspended through the ages
This is a world I have known
When I but wake in my sleep
To sleep in my wake
His language is through the eyes
He stretches my face to the heavens
Where there is nothing to hide
"I have seen this face of the world
I have known this place of the gods
As you have through your wonderings"

*Rainer Maria Rilke

On a Cruise with Wallace Stevens

by Paul Rosencrans

The smell of salt, call of seagulls
The shouts and screams of kids
As they frolic about in crystal clear water
Lying under a giant umbrella listening to
Wallace reciting poems and stories
Of the glory days back when life was slower
Lying there on the polished deck
With butlers standing ready to bring
Any assortment of tropical concoctions
Lathering on SPF with the exasperated voice of Wallace
Chanting out verses as they flow repeatedly after each
Other like the waves lapping at the side of the vessel

Undressing Sara Teasdale

by Lauren Zimmerman

As I approached her, I know that
She was not the type I would
Take on a hike,
Nor would I ask her to
Play a match of tennis.
Seeing her small,
Frail, petite frame I thought
To myself
“Hmm maybe to a pottery class?”
And I thought, “No,
She would not enjoy getting
Her freshly manicured nails dirty.”
And then the thought jumped in my head.
I shall take Sara for a girl’s day out.
First tea, then nails, and then shopping.
This way she could express herself through
The color of her nails or the outfit
She picked while shopping.
This was perfect!

Spending Midnight with Dylan Thomas by Casey Barth

Basement,
Dimly lit and stuffy,
Sparsely furnished with a fridge stuffed in a corner,
Bucket standing strong in the middle of the room,
Thomas gagging and choking the night's contents inside,

Waiting,
Watching him suffer,
Rise quickly and advance to aid in his misery,
Hold his hair back and tilt his head in the right angle,
Empty the contents in the bucket and wash it clean,

Cries,
Another heave hits,
But without his bucket to empty his creativity and dinner,
Throw him the pail and grab the mop for cleaning,
Passed out on the floor, not to be woken until morning,
What a night to spend with such a deep man,
Now knee deep in his own vomit,
Again.

Walking With Walt Whitman

by Bronte Yardley

Together we walk, Side-by-side,

Touching, Dreaming, Talking

The softness of your fingers glides across my skin

Gossamer wings

I walk next to you, I am your follower.

You, who I wish to devour

To Consume,

I want to submerge myself with-in you

You walk ahead.

Why will you not stay by my-side? Will you not follow me,

Like I have follow'd you?

I watch your back, your shoulders, your neck

you turn, your hand stretch'd out

beckoning, welcoming,

I grasp the firmness of your hand,

Calloused from work, Gentle, Warm

Hand-in-Hand we walk, you speak of body, of soul

Your words caress me

They slip into me

Until we part, I am to be your lover,

I will caress your body and your soul

Until night , when all we have are Dreams

I will be your body and your soul.

Taking a Walk in Nature with Oscar Wilde **by Brandon Nguyen**

I am going on a walk in nature with Oscar Wilde
To discover all the parts of his great life,
To find the inspiration of Oscar,
To find out about his relationship with his wife.
I want to know everything about Wilde.
I want to know everything about his life.

We start by walking past the daisies,
One of Oscar's favorite things on the walk.
Oscar uses daisies in his poems often for the symbolism.
We walk through the lilies as we begin to talk.
Oscar tells me about the way he writes.
Oscar tells me of the things he likes, as we pass the dock.

Now we are standing looking out across the sea.
Oscar then tells me about his style of writing.
Oscar tells me that his style of writing is different from others.
He tells me that his style of writing is not that exciting.
But Oscar tells me that his poetry includes much deeper meanings and much symbolism.
To me Oscar's style is very inviting.

We finally arrive at the garden of lilies.
This is indeed Oscar's favorite flower.
Oscar tells me he likes to use this flower for symbolism.
Oscar tells me about his symbolism of the lily flower and all of its power.
He says it gives an image of innocence and pureness of the heart.
Oscar is telling me this as we reach the familiar bell tower.

This walk in nature has almost come to an end,
But Oscar wanted to give me one last piece of advice.
Oscar wanted to say
Every man's love has no price,
Every man kills the thing he loves.
Think about this twice.

In Gaol with Oscar Wilde

by Rebecca Smith

In a lonely cell, locked away from society,
I meet Oscar Wilde.
I have all the time in the world to get to know his life story
And I suggest, because he is so complex, I should put my all into this,
But at first I am confused; it's almost as if he is speaking a different language.
I'm blinded then as he begins to speak;
The tragedy in his voice is nearly too much for me to handle.
I look away, but he keeps calling out to me.
I know it's worth a second chance, so I look back,
Thinking this time I'll pay closer attention.
His words twist my mind, challenge my thoughts;
They overwhelm me, dig into me,
And I can tell his exterior shows none of the emotion his interior holds.
After my blindness goes away, and I accommodate my vision to the new light,
I begin to follow him, entranced in his rhythmic, educated way of explaining.
It takes a long time, and I ask him to repeat many of the words he says,
But eventually I've peeled back all the layers, and come to know the mystery
That is Oscar Wilde.

Going to Jail with Oscar Wilde

by Nate Yokell

Riding my bike home from work one afternoon,
I saw some peculiar sight before me.
There were a dozen men running around the sidewalk.
Can anyone say public indecency?

Well, apparently someone out there could,
Because within a few seconds the police arrived.
Now there was one thing that I had always feared,
It was prison from whence my fears were derived.

If that's the truth, then that day was unlucky,
For in the confusion I had stopped to help.
Oh, the friendly policemen thought that I was with them,
And arrested me. How their canines bit and yelped.

There was this one man named Oscar with me.
I thought I recognized him somewhere.
There was something funny about him;
He had about him this bizarre air.

They took us to the jail outside of Reading,
That was the last place I wanted to be,
Especially with this nutcase Oscar,
Who chattered frantically about his Persephone.

We came to the jail quickly enough.
I just wanted to be out of the dreadful place,
But he seemed to bask in its despair and filth.
He simply smiled with a wistful eye on his face.

The skies were clear when we arrived,
But shortly, snow began to quickly fall.
He was looking around as if for something dear,
But seemed to recognize nothing at all.

That was until we reached the quaint cemetery
That they'd set up for all of the deceased.
He stopped by a stone marked with daisies.
I saw a tear hit his eyes as he fell to his knees.

He cried, as though his whole heart was buried there.
He wouldn't have stopped for all the world's wealth.
"For each man kills the thing he loves," he yelled!
"And I am no different! My soul runs for hell."

I never had the chance to ask him what he meant
For at that moment the policeman returned.
From where, I've no idea, but they pulled me away,
Leaving that man in the snow, frozen, but burned.

They released me thereafter to go on my way.
I couldn't get the thought of the man from my mind.
What was he saying? Had he done something terrible?
Of course not. He was just a misguided man.

He had faltered from the right path, obviously.
Though I could find no malice within him,
His words failed not to chill my very bones.
I thought, hoped, wished, that I wouldn't see him again.

That's why I went to visit him yesterday.
I left that prison three years ago today.
For his petty crime, that was forever to stay,
Yet I knew somehow he would be there that day.

As it turns out, he confessed to a crime.
That cold December day.
Midst the mud and grime, the gravestone had kept
The victim of his prey.

He killed the thing he loved, just as he said he had.
He laid her down one night to sleep; she woke up nevermore.
They'd bickered, yelled, fought. He had gotten mad.
And this man killed the thing he loved, a brave man, with a sword.

Sitting in the Garden with William Carlos Williams

by Allie Mattson

Now, Doctor Williams,
Can I call you that?
I have to say I love your work,
I'm not a big poetry fan, but yours in the best I've ever read.
Most of the time, poetry is stiff or boring,
But yours hits me on the head; it sticks out to me so much.
Other people may get after other poets for the way they write,
And being a doctor and a poet at the same time must be tough,
But I think you do a wonderful job.
I don't want to sit here and suck up to you about your work,
But I just want to let you know,
And I feel like the garden is the best place to let you know
That you have one teenage fan over here!

Gone Fishing with William Wordsworth

written by Melissa Doan

I followed in his known footprints
reflecting on the soul of their outline,
Deeply remembered is his imprint
where I have barely begun to start mine.
The trees whispered thoughts to ponder
to the lonely clouds whose life wandered.

Interminable as the heart of Nature
was the landscape I saw at a glance.
Here, kindness dwelled and dreams were feathers
and daffodils grew warmer perchance.
The sparkling stream held waves and petals
as the leaves danced on the ripples.

He then gave me a piece of worldly advice:
Live with your heart, act with your mind.
Don't forget about the gifts of solitude twice,
And to the lessons of nature, be not blind.
"And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils."

inspired by William Wordsworth's "The Daffodils"

A Walk through the Woods with William Wordsworth
by Grace Aguilera

*The evergreen trees sway in the breeze,
The clouds are moving quickly across the sky,
And the rest of the world seems to freeze,
And over the forest trail we fly.*

*Talk of past and forbidden love pass through his lips,
Mixed feelings, and indecision about indecision.
For a minute he looks down at his feet,
But the moment passes and his eyes return to the world
Around us.*

*His eyes reflect the greens and dark browns.
The earth is damp and soft.
The moss growing on fallen trees
Beckons to be sat upon.*

*Next to the log, a few daffodils dance
In a patch of sunlight.*

Walking in the Woods with William Wordsworth

by MaryAnn Grover

Such a brisk, beautiful morning
In the beginning of spring.
William is dressed in his usual attire,
Ready for a day lit on fire.
For a long time, we walk
But still we don't talk.
It is then I finally meet him.

We talk and talk for hours,
As he gazes at the flowers.
"My heart leaps up!"
He quickly exclaims
At the beauty of such a day.

He was a pensive man,
With little interest in the fan.
He observes nature in all its grace,
And with a huge smile on his face,
He turns to me and states,
This day must be in the fates.

After a walk in the woods,
We wandered into town,
To Westminster Bridge,
Where we watch the river flow,
All the time it's beautiful to see William glow.

William is a simple man,
Who does not care to run.
He likes to enjoy the fun
That life offers each day.
My walk in the woods with William today.