



Poem Copies

Semifinal One

Round One

1. Greer Kennedy (Vermont)

MR. DARCY

BY VICTORIA CHANG

In the end she just wanted the house

and a horse not much more what

if he didn't own the house or worse

not even a horse how do we

separate the things from a man the man from

the things is a man still the same

without his reins here it rains every fifteen

minutes it would be foolish to

marry a man without an umbrella did

Cinderella really love the prince or

just the prints on the curtains in the

ballroom once I went window-

shopping but I didn't want a window when
do you know it's time to get a new
man one who can win more things at the
fair I already have four stuffed
pandas from the fair I won fair and square
is it time to be less square to wear
something more revealing in *North and*
South she does the dealing gives him
the money in the end but she falls in love
with him when he has the money when
he is still running away if the water is
running in the other room is it wrong
for me to not want to chase it because it owns
nothing else when I wave to a man I
love what happens when another man with
a lot more bags waves back

2. M. Harris (Maryland)

STOMP

BY NIKKI GRIMES

I come home,
feet about to bleed
from angry stomping.
"Boy!" says Mom.
"Quit making all that racket."
But what does she expect
when, day after day,
haters sling words at me
like jagged stones
designed to split my skin?
I retreat to my room,
collapse on the bed,
count, "One. Two. Three..."
When I get to ten,
I snatch up journal and pen,
flip to a clean page,
and unload my hurt, my rage

'til I can breathe, again.

Letter by letter,

I rediscover

my power to decide

which words matter,

which words don't,

and whose.

Calm, now, I remember:

I get to choose.

3. Peachy Lee (Pennsylvania)

CARTOON PHYSICS, PART 1

BY NICK FLYNN

Children under, say, *ten*, shouldn't know
that the universe is ever-expanding,
inexorably pushing into the vacuum, galaxies

swallowed by galaxies, whole

solar systems collapsing, all of it
acted out in silence. At ten we are still learning

the rules of cartoon animation,

that if a man draws a door on a rock
only he can pass through it.

Anyone else who tries

will crash into the rock. Ten-year-olds
should stick with burning houses, car wrecks,
ships going down—earthbound, tangible

disasters, arenas

where they can be heroes. You can run
back into a burning house, sinking ships

have lifeboats, the trucks will come
with their ladders, if you jump

you will be saved. A child

places her hand on the roof of a schoolbus,
& drives across a city of sand. She knows

the exact spot it will skid, at which point
the bridge will give, who will swim to safety
& who will be pulled under by sharks. She will learn

that if a man runs off the edge of a cliff

he will not fall

until he notices his mistake.

4. Evalynn Bogusz (Virginia)

"UN TINTERO," INKWELL

BY DESIRÉE ALVAREZ

Anger is the other person inside

mi garganta, my throat.

The mouth's mouth is the deepest.

Rage is the homeless boy fallen down a well.

Shout down and he will echo back.

La lengua, tongue.

How long have you been down there?

Subterráneo, underground.

The letters of Cortés are difficult to read,

on each page a horse dies.

The lord of the city lives homeless in a canoe.

Hundreds of natives are speared.

Another town is burned alive
with all its caged creatures.

On each page the people appear to walk
over their dead.

La tierra estercolada, the earth fertilized,
spreads a cloth whose pattern repeats.

On each page the future arrives
on a raft woven of snakes.

Over and over, the design obliterates.

Never does he say this was their home we took.

5. Warwick Lloyd (District of Columbia)

THE AFFLICTION OF RICHARD

BY ROBERT BRIDGES

Love not too much. But how,

When thou hast made me such,

And dost thy gifts bestow,

How can I love too much?

Though I must fear to lose,

And drown my joy in care,

With all its thorns I choose

The path of love and prayer.

Though thou, I know not why,

Didst kill my childish trust,

That breach with toil did I

Repair, because I must:

And spite of frightening schemes,

With which the fiends of Hell

Blaspheme thee in my dreams,

So far I have hoped well.

But what the heavenly key,

What marvel in me wrought

Shall quite exculpate thee,

I have no shadow of thought.

What am I that complain?

The love, from which began

My question sad and vain,

Justifies thee to man.

6. Lydia Smith (New Jersey)

ANTHEM FOR MY BELLY AFTER EATING TOO MUCH

BY KARA JACKSON

i look in the mirror, and all the chips i've eaten
this month have accumulated
like schoolwork at the bottom of my tummy,
my belly—a country i'm trying to love.
my mouth is a lover devoted to you, my belly, my belly
the birds will string a song together
with wind for you and your army
of solids, militia of grease.
americans love excess, but we also love jeans,
and refuse to make excess comfortable in them.
i step into a fashionable prison,
my middle managed and fastened into
suffering. my gracious gut,
dutiful dome, i will wear a house for you
that you can live in, promise walls

that embrace your growing flesh,
and watch you reach toward everything possible.

7. Natasha B. Connolly (Rhode Island)

FAIRY TALE WITH LARYNGITIS AND RESIGNATION LETTER

BY JEHANNE DUBROW

You remember the mermaid makes a deal,
her tongue evicted from her throat,
and moving is a knife-cut with every step.
This is what escape from water means.
Dear Colleagues, you write, for weeks
I've been typing this letter in the bright
kingdom of my imagination. Your body
is a ship of pain. Pleasure is when you climb
the rocks and watch the moonlight
touching everywhere you want to go,
a silver world called faraway. Dear Colleagues,
you write, this place is a few sentences
contained by the cursor's rippling barrier—
what happened here is only beaks
and brackets, the serif's liquid stroke.
The old story has witches, a prince in love

with the surging silence of women,
a knife that turns the water red. You write,
Dear Colleagues, now these years are filed
in the infinite oceans of bureaucracy.
Everything bleaches or fades. In other words,
goodbye. Sometimes it's possible to walk,
although you've been told inside the oyster
shell of your heart there is no soul.
Creatures like you must end as a spray of salt,
green droplets floating breathless in the air.

8. Morgan Sprouse (West Virginia)

PERHAPS THE WORLD ENDS HERE

BY JOY HARJO

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

9. James Masson (New York)

THE SPRING

BY THOMAS CAREW

Now that the winter's gone, the earth hath lost
Her snow-white robes, and now no more the frost
Candies the grass, or casts an icy cream
Upon the silver lake or crystal stream;
But the warm sun thaws the benumbed earth,
And makes it tender; gives a sacred birth
To the dead swallow; wakes in hollow tree
The drowsy cuckoo, and the humble-bee.
Now do a choir of chirping minstrels bring
In triumph to the world the youthful Spring.
The valleys, hills, and woods in rich array
Welcome the coming of the long'd-for May.
Now all things smile, only my love doth lour;
Nor hath the scalding noonday sun the power
To melt that marble ice, which still doth hold
Her heart congeal'd, and makes her pity cold.

The ox, which lately did for shelter fly
Into the stall, doth now securely lie
In open fields; and love no more is made
By the fireside, but in the cooler shade
Amyntas now doth with his Chloris sleep
Under a sycamore, and all things keep
Time with the season; only she doth carry
June in her eyes, in her heart January.

10. Hiba Loukssi (Ohio)

AUTHOR'S PRAYER

BY ILYA KAMINSKY

If I speak for the dead, I must leave
this animal of my body,

I must write the same poem over and over,
for an empty page is the white flag of their surrender.

If I speak for them, I must walk on the edge
of myself, I must live as a blind man

who runs through rooms without
touching the furniture.

Yes, I live. I can cross the streets asking "What year is it?"

I can dance in my sleep and laugh

in front of the mirror.

Even sleep is a prayer, Lord,

I will praise your madness, and

in a language not mine, speak

of music that wakes us, music

in which we move. For whatever I say

is a kind of petition, and the darkest

days must I praise.

11. Abigail Case (Maine)

ABECEDARIAN REQUIRING FURTHER EXAMINATION OF ANGLIKAN SERAPHYM SUBJUGATION OF A WILD INDIAN REZERVATION

BY NATALIE DIAZ

Angels don't come to the reservation.
Bats, maybe, or owls, boxy mottled things.
Coyotes, too. They all mean the same thing—
death. And death
eats angels, I guess, because I haven't seen an angel
fly through this valley ever.
Gabriel? Never heard of him. Know a guy named Gabe though—
he came through here one powwow and stayed, typical
Indian. Sure he had wings,
jailbird that he was. He flies around in stolen cars. Wherever he stops,
kids grow like gourds from women's bellies.
Like I said, no Indian I've ever heard of has ever been or seen an angel.
Maybe in a Christmas pageant or something—
Nazarene church holds one every December,
organized by Pastor John's wife. It's no wonder

Pastor John's son is the angel—everyone knows angels are white.

Quit bothering with angels, I say. They're no good for Indians.

Remember what happened last time

some white god came floating across the ocean?

Truth is, there may be angels, but if there are angels

up there, living on clouds or sitting on thrones across the sea wearing

velvet robes and golden rings, drinking whiskey from silver cups,

we're better off if they stay rich and fat and ugly and

exactly where they are—in their own distant heavens.

You better hope you never see angels on the rez. If you do, they'll be

marching you off to

Zion or Oklahoma, or some other hell they've mapped out for us.

12. Ella Weinmann (New Hampshire)

IT WAS NOT DEATH, FOR I STOOD UP, (355)

BY EMILY DICKINSON

It was not Death, for I stood up,
And all the Dead, lie down –
It was not Night, for all the Bells
Put out their Tongues, for Noon.

It was not Frost, for on my Flesh
I felt Siroccos – crawl –
Nor Fire – for just my marble feet
Could keep a Chancel, cool –

And yet, it tasted, like them all,
The Figures I have seen
Set orderly, for Burial
Reminded me, of mine –

As if my life were shaven,
And fitted to a frame,
And could not breathe without a key,
And 'twas like Midnight, some –

When everything that ticked – has stopped –
And space stares – all around –
Or Grisly frosts – first Autumn morns,
Repeal the Beating Ground –

But most, like Chaos – Stopless – cool –
Without a Chance, or spar –
Or even a Report of Land –
To justify – Despair.

**The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

13. Catherine Wooten (South Carolina)

HOLY SONNETS: DEATH, BE NOT PROUD

BY JOHN DONNE

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

14. Jaden D. Riley (Massachusetts)

THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

15. Annelia N. Graham (U.S. Virgin Islands)

HANGING FIRE

BY AUDRE LORD

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.

16. Wm. Leete (Connecticut)

EPITAPH

BY KATHERINE PHILIPS

On her Son H.P. at St. Syth's Church where her body also lies interred

What on Earth deserves our trust?
Youth and Beauty both are dust.
Long we gathering are with pain,
What one moment calls again.
Seven years childless marriage past,
A Son, a son is born at last:
So exactly lim'd and fair,
Full of good Spirits, Meen, and Air,
As a long life promised,
Yet, in less than six weeks dead.
Too promising, too great a mind
In so small room to be confined:
Therefore, as fit in Heaven to dwell,
He quickly broke the Prison shell.

So the subtle Alchemist,
Can't with Hermes Seal resist
The powerful spirit's subtler flight,
But t'will bid him long good night.
And so the Sun if it arise
Half so glorious as his Eyes,
Like this Infant, takes a shroud,
Buried in a morning Cloud.

17. Abby Sullivan (North Carolina)

BEAUTIFUL WRECKAGE

BY W.D. EHRHART

What if I didn't shoot the old lady
running away from our patrol,
or the old man in the back of the head,
or the boy in the marketplace?

Or what if the boy—but he didn't
have a grenade, and the woman in Hue
didn't lie in the rain in a mortar pit
with seven Marines just for food,

Gaffney didn't get hit in the knee,
Ames didn't die in the river, Ski
didn't die in a medevac chopper
between Con Thien and Da Nang.

In Vietnamese, Con Thien means
place of angels. What if it really was
instead of the place of rotting sandbags,
incoming heavy artillery, rats and mud.

What if the angels were Ames and Ski,
or the lady, the man, and the boy,
and they lifted Gaffney out of the mud
and healed his shattered knee?

What if none of it happened the way I said?

Would it all be a lie?

Would the wreckage be suddenly beautiful?

Would the dead rise up and walk?

18. Maiss Hussein (Delaware)

NO, I WASN'T MEANT TO LOVE AND BE LOVED

BY MIRZA ASADULLAH KHAN GHALIB

Translated by Vijay Seshadri

No, I wasn't meant to love and be loved.

If I'd lived longer, I would have waited longer.

Knowing you are faithless keeps me alive and hungry.

Knowing you faithful would kill me with joy.

Delicate are you, and your vows are delicate, too,
so easily do they break.

You are a laconic marksman. You leave me
not dead but perpetually dying.

I want my friends to heal me, succor me.
Instead, I get analysis.

Conflagrations that would make stones drip blood
are campfires compared to my anguish.

Two-headed, inescapable anguish!—
Love's anguish or the anguish of time.

Another dark, severing, incommunicable night.
Death would be fine, if I only died once.

I would have liked a solitary death,
not this lavish funeral, this grave anyone can visit.

You are mystical, Ghalib, and, also, you speak beautifully.
Are you a saint, or just drunk as usual?

Round Two

1. Greer Kennedy (Vermont)

ON THE DEATH OF ANNE BRONTË

BY CHARLOTTE BRONTË

There's little joy in life for me,
 And little terror in the grave;
I 've lived the parting hour to see
 Of one I would have died to save.

Calmly to watch the failing breath,
 Wishing each sigh might be the last;
Longing to see the shade of death
 O'er those belovèd features cast.

The cloud, the stillness that must part
 The darling of my life from me;
And then to thank God from my heart,
 To thank Him well and fervently;

Although I knew that we had lost
The hope and glory of our life;
And now, benighted, tempest-tossed,
Must bear alone the weary strife.

2. M. Harris (Maryland)

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3. Peachy Lee (Pennsylvania)

ENGLAND IN 1819

BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying King;
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring;
Rulers who neither see nor feel nor know,
But leechlike to their fainting country cling
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow.
A people starved and stabbed in th' untilled field;
An army, whom liberticide and prey
Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield;
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;
Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed;
A senate, Time's worst statute, unrepealed—
Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may
Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

4. Evalynn Bogusz (Virginia)

MEETING AT AN AIRPORT

BY TAHA MUHAMMAD ALI

You asked me once,
on our way back
from the midmorning
trip to the spring:
“What do you hate,
and *who* do you love?”

And I answered,
from behind the eyelashes
of my surprise,
my blood rushing
like the shadow
cast by a cloud of starlings:
“I hate departure . . .
I love the spring
and the path to the spring,

and I worship the middle
hours of morning.”
And you laughed . . .
and the almond tree blossomed
and the thicket grew loud with nightingales.

. . . A question
now four decades old:
I salute that question’s answer;
and an answer
as old as your departure;
I salute that answer’s question . . .

And today,
it’s preposterous,
here we are at a friendly airport
by the slimmest of chances,
and we meet.

Ah, Lord!

we meet.

And here you are
asking—again,

it's absolutely preposterous—

I recognized you

but you didn't recognize me.

"Is it you?!"

But you wouldn't believe it.

And suddenly

you burst out and asked:

"If you're really you,

What do you hate

and *who* do you love?!"

And I answered—

my blood

fleeing the hall,

rushing in me

like the shadow

cast by a cloud of starlings:

"I hate departure,

and I love the spring,

and the path to the spring,

and I worship the middle

hours of morning."

And you wept,
and flowers bowed their heads,
and doves in the silk of their sorrow stumbled.

5. Warwick Lloyd (District of Columbia)

MEMORY AS A HEARING AID

BY TONY HOAGLAND

Somewhere, someone is asking a question,
and I stand squinting at the classroom
with one hand cupped behind my ear,
trying to figure out where that voice is coming from.

I might be already an old man,
attempting to recall the night
his hearing got misplaced,
front-row-center at a battle of the bands,
where a lot of leather-clad, second-rate musicians,
amped up to dinosaur proportions,
test drove their equipment through our ears.
Each time the drummer threw a tantrum,

the guitarist whirled and sprayed us with machine-gun riffs,
as if they wished that they could knock us
quite literally dead.

We called that fun in 1970,

when we weren't sure our lives were worth surviving.

I'm here to tell you that they were,
and many of us did, despite ourselves,
though the road from there to here

is paved with dead brain cells,
parents shocked to silence,
and squad cars painting the whole neighborhood
the quaking tint and texture of red jelly.

Friends, we should have postmarks on our foreheads
to show where we have been;
we should have pointed ears, or polka-dotted skin
to show what we were thinking

when we hot-rodged over God's front lawn,
and Death kept blinking.

But here I stand, an average-looking man
staring at a room

where someone blond in braids
with a beautiful belief in answers
is still asking questions.

Through the silence in my dead ear,
I can almost hear the future whisper
to the past: it says that this is not a test
and everybody passes.

6. Lydia Smith (New Jersey)

APRIL MIDNIGHT

BY ARTHUR SYMONS

Side by side through the streets at midnight,
Roaming together,
Through the tumultuous night of London,
In the miraculous April weather.

Roaming together under the gaslight,
Day's work over,
How the Spring calls to us, here in the city,
Calls to the heart from the heart of a lover!

Cool the wind blows, fresh in our faces,
Cleansing, entrancing,
After the heat and the fumes and the footlights,
Where you dance and I watch your dancing.

Good it is to be here together,

Good to be roaming,
Even in London, even at midnight,
Lover-like in a lover's gloaming.

You the dancer and I the dreamer,
Children together,
Wandering lost in the night of London,
In the miraculous April weather.

7. Natasha B. Connolly (Rhode Island)

UNDER THE VULTURE-TREE

BY DAVID BOTTOMS

We have all seen them circling pastures,
have looked up from the mouth of a barn, a pine clearing,
the fences of our own backyards, and have stood
amazed by the one slow wing beat, the endless dihedral drift.

But I had never seen so many so close, hundreds,
every limb of the dead oak feathered black,

and I cut the engine, let the river grab the jon boat
and pull it toward the tree.

The black leaves shined, the pink fruit blossomed
red, ugly as a human heart.

Then, as I passed under their dream, I saw for the first time
its soft countenance, the raw fleshy jowls
wrinkled and generous, like the faces of the very old
who have grown to empathize with everything.

And I drifted away from them, slow, on the pull of the river,
reluctant, looking back at their roost,
calling them what I'd never called them, what they are,
those dwarfed transfiguring angels,
who flock to the side of the poisoned fox, the mud turtle
crushed on the shoulder of the road,
who pray over the leaf-graves of the anonymous lost,
with mercy enough to consume us all and give us wings.

8. Morgan Sprouse (West Virginia)

SHALL EARTH NO MORE INSPIRE THEE

BY EMILY BRONTË

Shall earth no more inspire thee,
Thou lonely dreamer now?
Since passion may not fire thee
Shall Nature cease to bow?

Thy mind is ever moving
In regions dark to thee;
Recall its useless roving—
Come back and dwell with me.

I know my mountain breezes
Enchant and soothe thee still—
I know my sunshine pleases
Despite thy wayward will.

When day with evening blending

Sinks from the summer sky,
I've seen thy spirit bending
In fond idolatry.

I've watched thee every hour;
I know my mighty sway,
I know my magic power
To drive thy griefs away.

Few hearts to mortals given
On earth so wildly pine;
Yet none would ask a heaven
More like this earth than thine.

Then let my winds caress thee;
Thy comrade let me be—
Since nought beside can bless thee,
Return and dwell with me.

9. James Masson (New York)

LARKINESQUE

BY MICHAEL RYAN

Reading in the paper a summary
of a five-year psychological study
that shows those perceived as most beautiful
are treated differently,

I think *they could have just asked me,*
remembering a kind of pudgy kid
and late puberty, the bloody noses
and wisecracks because I wore glasses,

though we all know by now how awful it is
for the busty starlet no one takes seriously,
the loveliest women I've lunched with
lamenting the opacity of the body,

they can never trust a man's interest

even when he seems not just out for sex
(eyes focus on me above rim of wineglass),
and who *would* want to live like this?

And what does beauty do to a man?—
Don Juan, Casanova, Lord Byron—
those fiery eyes and steel jawlines
can front a furnace of self-loathing,

all those breathless women rushing to him
while hubby's at the office or ball game,
primed to be consumed by his beauty
while he stands next to it, watching.

So maybe the looks we're dealt are best.
It's only common sense that happiness
depends on some bearable deprivation
or defect, and who knows what conflicts

great beauty could have caused,
what cruelties one might have suffered
from those now friends, what unmanageable

possibilities smiling at every small turn?

So if I get up to draw a tumbler
of ordinary tap water and think *what if this were
nectar dripping from delicious burning fingers,*
will all I've missed knock me senseless?

No. Of course not. It won't.

10. Hiba Loukssi (Ohio)

THERE ARE BIRDS HERE

BY JAMAAL MAY

For Detroit

There are birds here,
so many birds here
is what I was trying to say
when they said those birds were metaphors
for what is trapped
between buildings
and buildings. No.
The birds are here
to root around for bread
the girl's hands tear
and toss like confetti. No,
I don't mean the bread is torn like cotton,
I said confetti, and no
not the confetti

a tank can make of a building.
I mean the confetti
a boy can't stop smiling about
and no his smile isn't much
like a skeleton at all. And no
his neighborhood is not like a war zone.
I am trying to say
his neighborhood
is as tattered and feathered
as anything else,
as shadow pierced by sun
and light parted
by shadow-dance as anything else,
but they won't stop saying
how lovely the ruins,
how ruined the lovely
children must be in that birdless city.

11. Abigail Case (Maine)

RESPECTABILITY

BY TINA BOYER BROWN

We ask our children
to act calm/nervous/whatever
innocent looks like when
some cop shows his badge/pulls his gun/slow his car.

We beg kids
to say soft *yes sirs*.
We beg kids
to get on the hood of that car/empty their pockets/shut up/put your
hands behind your head.

No is an existential threat.
No is an existential threat.
No is an existential threat.
No is an existential threat.

Never is an existential threat.

Never is an existential threat.

Never is an existential threat.

Never is an existential threat.

We dare ask for humility

in the face of this oppression?

We have no idea what the threat feels like,

but we know

Breonna

Rekia

Sandra

Nia

Bettie

Yvette

Miriam

Shereese

Ahmaud

Trayvon

Eric

Laquan

**Semifinal One
Round Two**

Michael

Philando

Stephon

Alton

Amadou

Akai

Quintonio

Rumai

John

Jordan

Jonathan

Reynaldo

Kendrec

Ramarley

Kenneth

Robert

Walter

Terence

Freddie

Samuel

George

Tamir

and more

and more

and more

There's no open wrist declaring our innocence that will confer peace
where innocents need.

Our children

stand in front of doors/pages/words/in the streets.

They shut down/they shut down/they shut down

the forces that burn against them.

12. Ella Weinmann (New Hampshire)

WHEN I HAVE FEARS THAT I MAY CEASE TO BE

BY JOHN KEATS

When I have fears that I may cease to be
 Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-pilèd books, in charactery,
 Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starred face,
 Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
 Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
 That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
 Of unreflecting love—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

13. Catherine Wooten (South Carolina)

LINES WRITTEN IN EARLY SPRING

BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;
And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,
Their thoughts I cannot measure:—
But the least motion which they made
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

If this belief from heaven be sent,
If such be Nature's holy plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man?

14. Jaden D. Riley (Massachusetts)

APRIL MIDNIGHT

BY ARTHUR SYMONS

Side by side through the streets at midnight,
Roaming together,
Through the tumultuous night of London,
In the miraculous April weather.

Roaming together under the gaslight,
Day's work over,
How the Spring calls to us, here in the city,
Calls to the heart from the heart of a lover!

Cool the wind blows, fresh in our faces,
Cleansing, entrancing,
After the heat and the fumes and the footlights,
Where you dance and I watch your dancing.

Good it is to be here together,

Good to be roaming,
Even in London, even at midnight,
Lover-like in a lover's gloaming.

You the dancer and I the dreamer,
Children together,
Wandering lost in the night of London,
In the miraculous April weather.

15. Annelia N. Graham (U.S. Virgin Islands)

I LOOK AT THE WORLD

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

I look at the world
From awakening eyes in a black face—
And this is what I see:
This fenced-off narrow space
Assigned to me.

I look then at the silly walls
Through dark eyes in a dark face—
And this is what I know:
That all these walls oppression builds
Will have to go!

I look at my own body
With eyes no longer blind—
And I see that my own hands can make
The world that's in my mind.

Then let us hurry, comrades,
The road to find.

16. Wm. Leete (Connecticut)

I AM OFFERING THIS POEM

BY JIMMY SANTIAGO BACA

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.

17. Abby Sullivan (North Carolina)

I HEARD A FLY BUZZ - WHEN I DIED - (591)

BY EMILY DICKINSON

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –

The Stillness in the Room

Was like the Stillness in the Air –

Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –

And Breaths were gathering firm

For that last Onset – when the King

Be witnessed – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away

What portion of me be

Assignable – and then it was

There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –

**The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

18. Maiss Hussein (Delaware)

THE POEM YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR

BY TARFIA FAIZULLAH

I saw then the white-eyed man
leaning in to see if I was ready

yet to go where he has been waiting
to take me. I saw then the gnawing

sounds my faith has been making
and I saw too that the shape it sings

in is the color of cast-iron mountains
I drove so long to find I forgot I had

been looking for them, for the you
I once knew and the you that was born

waiting for me to find you. I have been

twisting and turning across these lifetimes

where forgetting me is what you do

so you don't have to look at yourself. I saw

that I would drown in a creek carved out

of a field our incarnations forged the first path

through to those mountains. I invited you to stroll

with me there again for the first time, to pause

and sprawl in the grass while I read to you

the poem you hadn't known you'd been waiting

to hear. I read until you finally slept

and all your jagged syntaxes softened into rest.

You're always driving so far from me towards

the me I worry, without you, is eternity. I lay there,

awake, keeping watch while you snored.

I waited, as I always seem to, for you

to wake up and come back to me.

Round Three

1. Greer Kennedy (Vermont)

I AM OFFERING THIS POEM

BY JIMMY SANTIAGO BACA

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.

2. M. Harris (Maryland)

WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE

BY HARRYETTE MULLEN

We are not responsible for your lost or stolen relatives.

We cannot guarantee your safety if you disobey our instructions.

We do not endorse the causes or claims of people begging for handouts.

We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone.

Your ticket does not guarantee that we will honor your reservations.

In order to facilitate our procedures, please limit your carrying on.

Before taking off, please extinguish all smoldering resentments.

If you cannot understand English, you will be moved out of the way.

In the event of a loss, you'd better look out for yourself.

Your insurance was cancelled because we can no longer handle your frightful claims. Our handlers lost your luggage and we are unable to find the key to your legal case.

You were detained for interrogation because you fit the profile.

You are not presumed to be innocent if the police

have reason to suspect you are carrying a concealed wallet.

It's not our fault you were born wearing a gang color.

It is not our obligation to inform you of your rights.

Step aside, please, while our officer inspects your bad attitude.

You have no rights we are bound to respect.

Please remain calm, or we can't be held responsible

for what happens to you.

3. Peachy Lee (Pennsylvania)

SWEET TOOTH

BY RUSSELL EDSON

A little girl made of sugar and spice and everything nice was eaten by someone with a sweet tooth the size of an elephant's tusk.

Ah, he said, this darn tooth, it's driving me nuts.

Then another voice is heard. It's the little girl's father who says, have you seen a little girl made of sugar and spice and everything nice?—Incidentally, what's that thing sticking out of your mouth like an elephant's tusk?

My sweet tooth, and it's really driving me nuts.

You ought to see a dentist.

But he might want to pull it, and I don't like people pulling at me. If they want to pull they should pull at their own pullables.

So true, said the little girl's father, people should pull at their own pullables and let other people's pullables alone. But still, he asked again, I wonder if you've seen a little girl made of sugar and spice and everything nice?

4. Evalynn Bogusz (Virginia)

SONGS FOR THE PEOPLE

BY FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS HARPER

Let me make the songs for the people,
Songs for the old and young;
Songs to stir like a battle-cry
Wherever they are sung.

Not for the clashing of sabres,
For carnage nor for strife;
But songs to thrill the hearts of men
With more abundant life.

Let me make the songs for the weary,
Amid life's fever and fret,
Till hearts shall relax their tension,
And careworn brows forget.

Let me sing for little children,

Before their footsteps stray,
Sweet anthems of love and duty,
To float o'er life's highway.

I would sing for the poor and aged,
When shadows dim their sight;
Of the bright and restful mansions,
Where there shall be no night.

Our world, so worn and weary,
Needs music, pure and strong,
To hush the jangle and discords
Of sorrow, pain, and wrong.

Music to soothe all its sorrow,
Till war and crime shall cease;
And the hearts of men grown tender
Girdle the world with peace.

5. Warwick Lloyd (District of Columbia)

DANSE RUSSE

BY WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

If I when my wife is sleeping
and the baby and Kathleen
are sleeping
and the sun is a flame-white disc
in silken mists
above shining trees,—
if I in my north room
dance naked, grotesquely
before my mirror
waving my shirt round my head
and singing softly to myself:
“I am lonely, lonely.
I was born to be lonely,
I am best so!”
If I admire my arms, my face,

my shoulders, flanks, buttocks
against the yellow drawn shades,—

Who shall say I am not
the happy genius of my household?

6. Lydia Smith (New Jersey)

STOMP

BY NIKKI GRIMES

I come home,
feet about to bleed
from angry stomping.
"Boy!" says Mom.
"Quit making all that racket."
But what does she expect
when, day after day,
haters sling words at me
like jagged stones
designed to split my skin?
I retreat to my room,
collapse on the bed,
count, "One. Two. Three..."
When I get to ten,
I snatch up journal and pen,
flip to a clean page,

and unload my hurt, my rage

'til I can breathe, again.

Letter by letter,

I rediscover

my power to decide

which words matter,

which words don't,

and whose.

Calm, now, I remember:

I get to choose.

7. Natasha B. Connolly (Rhode Island)

NO, I WASN'T MEANT TO LOVE AND BE LOVED

BY MIRZA ASADULLAH KHAN GHALIB

Translated by Vijay Seshadri

No, I wasn't meant to love and be loved.

If I'd lived longer, I would have waited longer.

Knowing you are faithless keeps me alive and hungry.

Knowing you faithful would kill me with joy.

Delicate are you, and your vows are delicate, too,
so easily do they break.

You are a laconic marksman. You leave me
not dead but perpetually dying.

I want my friends to heal me, succor me.
Instead, I get analysis.

Conflagrations that would make stones drip blood
are campfires compared to my anguish.

Two-headed, inescapable anguish!—
Love's anguish or the anguish of time.

Another dark, severing, incommunicable night.
Death would be fine, if I only died once.

I would have liked a solitary death,
not this lavish funeral, this grave anyone can visit.

You are mystical, Ghalib, and, also, you speak beautifully.
Are you a saint, or just drunk as usual?

8. Morgan Sprouse (West Virginia)

I AM OFFERING THIS POEM

BY JIMMY SANTIAGO BACA

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.

9. James Masson (New York)

POOR ANGELS

BY EDWARD HIRSCH

At this hour the soul floats weightlessly
through the city streets, speechless and invisible,
astonished by the smoky blend of grays and golds
seeping out of the air, the dark half-tones

of dusk suddenly filling the urban sky
while the body sits listlessly by the window
sullen and heavy, too exhausted to move,
too weary to stand up or to lie down.

At this hour the soul is like a yellow wing
slipping through the treetops, a little ecstatic
cloud hovering over the sidewalks, calling out
to the approaching night, "Amaze me, amaze me,"

while the body sits glumly by the window
listening to the clear summons of the dead
transparent as glass, clairvoyant as crystal.
Some nights it is almost ready to join them.

Oh, this is a strange, unlikely tethering,
a furious grafting of the quick and the slow:
when the soul flies up, the body sinks down
and all night—locked in the same cramped room—

they go on quarreling, stubbornly threatening
to leave each other, wordlessly filling the air
with the sound of a low internal burning.
How long can this bewildering marriage last?

At midnight the soul dreams of a small fire
of stars flaming on the other side of the sky,
but the body stares into an empty night sheen,
a hollow-eyed darkness. Poor luckless angels,

feverish old loves: don't separate yet.

Let what rises live with what descends.

10. Hiba Loukssi (Ohio)

THE PARADOX

BY PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

I am the mother of sorrows,

I am the ender of grief;

I am the bud and the blossom,

I am the late-falling leaf.

I am thy priest and thy poet,

I am thy serf and thy king;

I cure the tears of the heartsick,

When I come near they shall sing.

White are my hands as the snowdrop;

Swart are my fingers as clay;

Dark is my frown as the midnight,

Fair is my brow as the day.

Battle and war are my minions,

Doing my will as divine;
I am the calmer of passions,
Peace is a nursling of mine.

Speak to me gently or curse me,
Seek me or fly from my sight;
I am thy fool in the morning,
Thou art my slave in the night.

Down to the grave will I take thee,
Out from the noise of the strife;
Then shalt thou see me and know me—
Death, then, no longer, but life.

Then shalt thou sing at my coming,
Kiss me with passionate breath,
Clasp me and smile to have thought me
Aught save the foeman of Death.

Come to me, brother, when weary,
Come when thy lonely heart swells;
I'll guide thy footsteps and lead thee

Down where the Dream Woman dwells.

11. Abigail Case (Maine)

I HEARD A FLY BUZZ - WHEN I DIED - (591)

BY EMILY DICKINSON

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –

The Stillness in the Room

Was like the Stillness in the Air –

Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –

And Breaths were gathering firm

For that last Onset – when the King

Be witnessed – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away

What portion of me be

Assignable – and then it was

There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –

**The inclusion or omission of the numeral in the title of the poem should not affect the accuracy score. It is optional during recitation.*

12. Ella Weinmann (New Hampshire)

THE WINDHOVER

BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

To Christ our Lord

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion

Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,

Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

13. Catherine Wooten (South Carolina)

TIME DOES NOT BRING RELIEF, YOU ALL HAVE LIED

BY EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied
Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
I miss him in the weeping of the rain;
I want him at the shrinking of the tide;
The old snows melt from every mountain-side,
And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;
But last year's bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide.
There are a hundred places where I fear
To go,—so with his memory they brim.
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell his foot or shone his face
I say, "There is no memory of him here!"
And so stand stricken, so remembering him.

14. Jaden D. Riley (Massachusetts)

MOVEMENT SONG

BY AUDRE LORDE

I have studied the tight curls on the back of your neck
moving away from me
beyond anger or failure
your face in the evening schools of longing
through mornings of wish and ripen
we were always saying goodbye
in the blood in the bone over coffee
before dashing for elevators going
in opposite directions
without goodbyes.

Do not remember me as a bridge nor a roof
as the maker of legends
nor as a trap
door to that world
where black and white clericals

hang on the edge of beauty in five oclock elevators
twitching their shoulders to avoid other flesh
and now
there is someone to speak for them
moving away from me into tomorrows
morning of wish and ripen
your goodbye is a promise of lightning
in the last angels hand
unwelcome and warning
the sands have run out against us
we were rewarded by journeys
away from each other
into desire
into mornings alone
where excuse and endurance mingle
conceiving decision.
Do not remember me
as disaster
nor as the keeper of secrets
I am a fellow rider in the cattle cars
watching
you move slowly out of my bed

saying we cannot waste time
only ourselves.

15. Annelia N. Graham (U.S. Virgin Islands)

**THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER: WHEN MY MOTHER DIED I WAS VERY
YOUNG**

BY WILLIAM BLAKE

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

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

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

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

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

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

16. Wm. Leete (Connecticut)

LUKE HAVERGAL

BY EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There where the vines cling crimson on the wall,
And in the twilight wait for what will come.
The leaves will whisper there of her, and some,
Like flying words, will strike you as they fall;
But go, and if you listen she will call.
Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies
To rift the fiery night that's in your eyes;
But there, where western glooms are gathering,
The dark will end the dark, if anything:
God slays Himself with every leaf that flies,
And hell is more than half of paradise.
No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies—

In eastern skies.

Out of a grave I come to tell you this,
Out of a grave I come to quench the kiss
That flames upon your forehead with a glow
That blinds you to the way that you must go.
Yes, there is yet one way to where she is,
Bitter, but one that faith may never miss.
Out of a grave I come to tell you this—
To tell you this.

There is the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There are the crimson leaves upon the wall.
Go, for the winds are tearing them away,—
Nor think to riddle the dead words they say,
Nor any more to feel them as they fall;
But go, and if you trust her she will call.
There is the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

17. Abby Sullivan (North Carolina)

A BLESSING

BY JAMES WRIGHT

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness.
They have come gladly out of the willows
To welcome my friend and me.
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness
That we have come.
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.
There is no loneliness like theirs.
At home once more,
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,
For she has walked over to me

And nuzzled my left hand.
She is black and white,
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.
Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom.

18. Maiss Hussein (Delaware)

THINGS YOU MAY FIND HIDDEN IN MY EAR

BY MOSAB ABU TOHA

For Alicia M. Quesnel, MD

i

When you open my ear, touch it
gently.

My mother's voice lingers somewhere inside.

Her voice is the echo that helps recover my equilibrium
when I feel dizzy during my attentiveness.

You may encounter songs in Arabic,
poems in English I recite to myself,
or a song I chant to the chirping birds in our backyard.

When you stitch the cut, don't forget to put all these back in my ear.
Put them back in order as you would do with books on your shelf.

ii

The drone's buzzing sound,
the roar of an F-16,
the screams of bombs falling on houses,
on fields, and on bodies,
of rockets flying away—
rid my small ear canal of them all.

Spray the perfume of your smiles on the incision.
Inject the song of life into my veins to wake me up.
Gently beat the drum so my mind may dance with yours,
my doctor, day and night.