

20 Poems Every Man Over 30 Should Know By Heart

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Not into poetry? That's about to change. Having a collection of great books at your fingertips is one thing, but finding some poets you connect with takes you to a whole new level. Whether you're memorizing them to sound super smart, to impress a girl, or — the best reason of all! — to expand your mind, these are 20 great poems to start with. For more essential reading, check out the .

1

“Invictus” by William Ernest Henley

The poem [Invictus](#) — which means “unconquered” in Latin — is all about the human spirit and overcoming any misfortunes or difficulties in your life. In fact, when Henley wrote it, he was in the hospital recovering from a leg amputation due to tuberculosis.

“It matters not how strait the gate, / How charged with punishments the scroll, / I am the master of my fate, / I am the captain of my soul,” Henley writes.

2

“Ode” by Arthur O’Shaughnessy

You’ve probably heard Arthur O’Shaughnessy’s 1873 poem [Ode](#) at some point in your life. (Heck, Willy Wonka even quoted it in the film!) Because it’s about artistic expression, it’s perfect for anyone who needs a little confidence boost while working on a creative project.

“WE are the music-makers, / And we are the dreamers of dreams, / Wandering by lone sea-breakers, / And sitting by desolate streams,” O’Shaughnessy writes. “World-losers and world-forsakers, / On whom the pale moon gleams: Yet we are the movers and shakers / Of the world for ever, it seems.”

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3

“Sonnet 29” by William Shakespeare

If you're down on your luck when it comes to your finances, you'll love William Shakespeare's Sonnet 29. In the end, life is about love — and how having spiritual wealth beats economic wealth any day.

“For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings, / That then I scorn to change my state with kings,” Shakespeare writes.

4

“She Walks in Beauty” by Lord Byron

There's a reason She Walks in Beauty is one of the most romantic poems of all time. She can try not to fall in love with you after you read it to her, but it's going to be hard not to.

“She walks in beauty, like the night / Of cloudless climes and starry skies; / And all that's best of dark and bright / Meet in her aspect and her eyes; / Thus mellowed to that tender light / Which heaven to gaudy day denies,” Byron writes.

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5

“Ode 1.11” by Horace

You know the phrase “Carpe diem,” aka “Seize the day”? The phrase that's still quoted non-stop came straight from Horace's Ode 1.11.

“Be wise, strain the wine, and cut back hope for a long life in a short time. / While we talk, envious time will flee: seize the day, trusting as little as possible to the future,” Horace writes.

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6

“Character of the Happy Warrior” by William Wordsworth

You don't need to be a soldier to appreciate [this poem](#). William Wordsworth talks about "happy warriors," but his words can apply to you in your battle of life, too.

"More skillful in self-knowledge, even more pure, / As tempted more; more able to endure, / As more exposed to suffering and distress; / Thence, also, more alive to tenderness," Wordsworth writes.

7

"Love's Language" by Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Want to make someone fall in love with you? You can't beat impressing them with a poem. [Love's Language](#) goes into exactly how love speaks — and spoiler: Emma Wheeler Wilcox totally nails it.

"In the embrace where madness melts in bliss, / And in the convulsive rapture of a kiss — / Thus doth Love speak," Wilcox writes.

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8

"Ulysses" by Alfred Tennyson

[Ulysses](#) is all about Ulysses' journey on his island of Ithaca: he's bored and wants to keep sailing, but since he's getting older, his time is running out. Everyone can learn a thing or two from these words.

"We are not now that strength which in old days / Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are; / One equal temper of heroic hearts, / Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will / To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," Tennyson writes.

9

"If" by Richard Kipling

The poem [If](#) has one purpose: giving advice to any man trying to find his place in the world, all while helping him become a better person in the process.

"If you can dream — and not make dreams your master; / If you can think — and not make thoughts your aim; / If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster / And treat those two impostors just the same," Kipling writes.

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10

"The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost

When reading The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost, you'll quickly realize the heart of the poem is all about choice — and how just one choice you make can change your life.

"I shall be telling this with a sigh / Somewhere ages and ages hence: / Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — / I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference," Frost writes.

11

"I Carry Your Heart With Me" by E.E. Cummings

What's better than having someone in your life who loves you enough to carry your heart with them wherever they go? That's exactly what E.E. Cummings wrote about in this poem.

"I carry your heart with me (I carry it in my heart) / I am never without it (anywhere I go you go, my dear; / and whatever is done by only me is your doing, my darling)," Cummings writes.

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12

"Opportunity" by John James Ingalls

This poem is all about opportunity and how it only comes along once. Evidently Theodore Roosevelt loved it so much that he hung it up in his office in the White House.

"Master of human destinies am I; Fame, love and fortune on my footsteps wait. / Cities and fields I walk. I penetrate Deserts and seas remote, and, passing by / Hovel and mart and palace, soon or late, I knock unbidden once at every gate," Ingalls writes.

13

“The Winners” by Rudyard Kipling

Have you ever wondered if you should ask for help on something or go solo? That’s what The Winners by Rudyard Kipling goes into — and according to this poet, you might just have more success in the end by doing your own thing.

“One may fall but he falls by himself — / Falls by himself with himself to blame. / One may attain and to him is pelf — / Loot of the city in Gold or Fame. / Plunder of earth shall be all his own / Who travels the fastest and travels alone,” Kipling writes.

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14

“Do Not Go Gentle Into That Night” by Dylan Thomas

It’s thought that Dylan Thomas wrote this poem to his dying father. After reading through the words, you’ll leave knowing exactly what it’s about: rebelling against death, even if the fight doesn’t seem worth it since it’s inevitable in the end.

“Do not go gentle into that good night, / Old age should burn and rave at close of day; / Rage, rage against the dying of the light,” Thomas writes.

15

“The Guest House” by Rumi

Going through some major changes? Guest House can give you some peace of mind. The poem is all about realizing each day you can allow something new to come into your life, and that can serve as a great reminder to not let your fears get in your way, to embrace change, and to roll with the punches.

“This being human is a guest house. / Every morning a new arrival. / A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes / As an unexpected visitor,” Rumi writes.

16

“I Wanna Be Yours” by John Cooper Clarke

Sometimes it's hard to find the right words when you're in love, and [I Wanna Be Yours](#) is perfect for anyone who can't quite articulate their feelings. (Yep, you're not alone!)

"I wanna be yours / let me be your vacuum cleaner / breathing in your dust / let me be your Ford Cortina/ I will never rust / If you like your coffee hot / let me be your coffee pot / you call the shots / I wanna be yours," Clarke writes.

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17

"A Dream Within a Dream" by Edgar Allan Poe

Want to read a poem that really makes you think? Try [A Dream With a Dream](#) by Edgar Allen Poe. In his words, he questions existence and reality, saying some people live life as if they were in a dream.

"Is all that we see or seem / But a dream within a dream?" Poe writes.

18

"Life is Fine" by Langston Hughes

This [poem](#) might seem like a downer, but it has a positive message: remaining positive despite going through a hard time. Because in the end, life is fine — even if you have to work at it.

"Life is fine! Fine as wine! Life is fine!" Hughes writes.

19

"Be Glad Your Nose Is on Your Face" by Jack Prelutsky

[Be Glad Your Nose Is on Your Face](#) might be aimed at kids, but it has a powerful message for grown-ups, too. Instead of trying to change yourself or something that's going good, be happy with what you have.

"Be glad your nose is on your face, / not pasted on some other place, / for if it were where it is not, / you might dislike your nose a lot," Prelutsky writes.

“Sonnet 18” by Shakespeare

Who captures love better than Shakespeare? Sonnet 18 is sure to make anyone you read it to completely swoon — guaranteed.

“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate: / Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, / And summer’s lease hath all too short a date,” Shakespeare writes.