

1. Solitude

By Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Laugh, and the world laughs with you,
Weep, and you weep alone;
For the sad old earth must borrow its mirth,
But has trouble enough of its own.

Sing, and the hills will answer,
Sigh, it is lost on the air;
The echoes bound to a joyful sound,
But shirk from voicing care.

Rejoice and men will seek you;
Grieve, and they turn and go;
They want full measure of all your pleasure,
But they do not need your woe.

Be glad, and your friends are many;
Be sad, and you lose them all,
There are none to decline your nectar'd wine,
But alone you must drink life's gall.

Feast, and your halls are crowded;
Fast, and the world goes by;
Succeed and give, and it helps you live,
But no man can help you die.

There is room in the halls of pleasure
For a large and lordly train,
But one by one we must all file on
Through the narrow aisle of pain.

(165 words)

2. The Way Through the Woods

By Rudyard Kipling

They shut the road through the woods
 Seventy years ago.
Weather and rain have undone it again,
 And now you would never know
There was once a road through the woods
 Before they planted the trees.
It is underneath the coppice and heath,
 And the thin anemones.
Only the keeper sees
That, where the ring-dove broods,
 And the badgers roll at ease,
There was once a road through the woods.

Yet, if you enter the woods
 Of a summer evening late,
When the night-air cools on the trout-ringed pools
 Where the otter whistles his mate,
(They fear not men in the woods,
 Because they see so few.)
You will hear the beat of a horse's feet,
 And the swish of a skirt in the dew,
Steadily cantering through
The misty solitudes,
 As though they perfectly knew
 The old lost road through the woods.
But there is no road through the woods.

(151 words)

3. See It Through

By Edgar A. Guest

When you're up against a trouble,
Meet it squarely, face to face;
Lift your chin and set your shoulders,
Plant your feet and take a brace.
When it's vain to try to dodge it,
Do the best that you can do;
You may fail, but you may conquer,
See it through!

Black may be the clouds about you
And your future may seem grim,
But don't let your nerve desert you;
Keep yourself in fighting trim.
If the worst is bound to happen,
Spite of all that you can do,
Running from it will not save you,
See it through!

Even hope may seem but futile,
When with troubles you're beset,
But remember you are facing
Just what other men have met.
You may fail, but fall still fighting;
Don't give up, whate'er you do;
Eyes front, head high to the finish.
See it through!

(145 words)

4. Good Timber

By Douglas Malloch

The tree that never had to fight
For sun and sky and air and light,
But stood out in the open plain
And always got its share of rain,
Never became a forest king
But lived and died a scrubby thing.

The man who never had to toil
To gain and farm his patch of soil,
Who never had to win his share
Of sun and sky and light and air,
Never became a manly man
But lived and died as he began.

Good timber does not grow with ease,
The stronger wind, the stronger trees,
The further sky, the greater length,
The more the storm, the more the strength.
By sun and cold, by rain and snow,
In trees and men good timbers grow.

Where thickest lies the forest growth
We find the patriarchs of both.
And they hold counsel with the stars
Whose broken branches show the scars
Of many winds and much of strife.
This is the common law of life.

(164 words)

5. Whatif

By Shel Silverstein

Last night, while I lay thinking here,
some Whatifs crawled inside my ear
and pranced and partied all night long
and sang their same old Whatif song:
Whatif I'm dumb in school?
Whatif they've closed the swimming pool?
Whatif I get beat up?
Whatif there's poison in my cup?
Whatif I start to cry?
Whatif I get sick and die?
Whatif I flunk that test?
Whatif green hair grows on my chest?
Whatif nobody likes me?
Whatif a bolt of lightning strikes me?
Whatif I don't grow talle?
Whatif my head starts getting smaller?
Whatif the fish won't bite?
Whatif the wind tears up my kite?
Whatif they start a war?
Whatif my parents get divorced?
Whatif the bus is late?
Whatif my teeth don't grow in straight?
Whatif I tear my pants?
Whatif I never learn to dance?
Everything seems well, and then
the nighttime Whatifs strike again!

(149 words)

6. Be Glad Your Nose Is on Your Face

By Jack Prelutsky

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.

Imagine if your precious nose
were sandwiched in between your toes,
that clearly would not be a treat,
for you'd be forced to smell your feet.

Your nose would be a source of dread
were it attached atop your head,
it soon would drive you to despair,
forever tickled by your hair.

Within your ear, your nose would be
an absolute catastrophe,
for when you were obliged to sneeze,
your brain would rattle from the breeze.

Your nose, instead, through thick and thin,
remains between your eyes and chin,
not pasted on some other place—
be glad your nose is on your face!

(132 words)