

## ESOL Poetry Selections

First Name:

Last Name:

ESOL HS Advanced

### **I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou**

The free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream  
till the current ends  
and dips his wings  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks  
down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through  
his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and  
his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with fearful trill  
of the things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn  
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

***(Continued on next page)***

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### I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (continued)

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

*\*\*\* CT-COLT has approved this poem,  
which slightly exceeds the 30-line guideline with the repeated last stanza.*

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### **It Is I Who Must Begin by Václav Havel**

It is I who must begin.  
Once I begin, once I try —  
here and now,  
right where I am,  
not excusing myself  
by saying things  
would be easier elsewhere,  
without grand speeches and  
ostentatious gestures,  
but all the more persistently  
— to live in harmony  
with the “voice of Being,” as I  
understand it within myself  
— as soon as I begin that,  
I suddenly discover,  
to my surprise, that  
I am neither the only one,  
nor the first,  
nor the most important one  
to have set out  
upon that road.  
Whether all is really lost  
or not depends entirely on  
whether or not I am lost.

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### **O Captain! My Captain!** by Walt Whitman

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,  
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;

But O heart! heart! heart!

O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;  
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,  
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding,  
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;

Here Captain! dear father!

This arm beneath your head!  
It is some dream that on the deck,  
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,  
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;

Exult O shores, and ring O bells!

But I with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.