Today is the anniversary of the publication of Robert Frost’s iconic poem “[Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42891/stopping-by-woods-on-a-snowy-evening),” a fact that spurred the Literary Hub office into a long conversation about their favorite poems, the most iconic poems written in English, and which poems we should all have already read (or at least be reading next). Turns out, despite frequent (false) claims that poetry is dead and/or irrelevant and/or boring, there are plenty of poems that have sunk deep into our collective consciousness as cultural icons. (What makes a poem iconic? For our purposes here, it’s primarily a matter of cultural ubiquity, though unimpeachable excellence helps any case.) So for those of you who were not present for our epic office argument, I have listed some of them here.

NB that I limited myself to one poem per poet—which means that the impetus for this list actually gets bumped for the widely quoted (and misunderstood) “The Road Not Taken,” but so it goes. I also excluded book-length poems, because they’re really a different form. Finally, despite the headline, I’m sure there are many, many iconic poems out there that I’ve missed—so feel free to extend this list in the comments. But for now, happy reading (and re-reading):

**William Carlos Williams, “**[**The Red Wheelbarrow**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45502/the-red-wheelbarrow)**”**

[The most anthologized poem of the last 25 years](https://lithub.com/the-most-anthologized-poems-of-the-last-25-years/) for a reason. See also: “[This is Just to Say](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56159/this-is-just-to-say),” which, among other things, has spawned a host of [memes and parodies](http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2015/07/poem-becomes-meme-forgive-me.html).

**T. S. Eliot, “**[**The Waste Land**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47311/the-waste-land-56d227a99ddeb)**”**

Without a doubt one of the most important poems of the 20th century. “It has never lost its glamour,” [Paul Muldoon observed](https://www.npr.org/2013/09/28/226564650/on-eliots-125th-his-waste-land-hasnt-lost-its-glamour). “It has never failed to be equal to both the fracture of its own era and what, alas, turned out to be the even greater fracture of the ongoing 20th century and now, it seems, the 21st century.” See also: “[The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/44212/the-love-song-of-j-alfred-prufrock).”

**Robert Frost, “**[**The Road Not Taken**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken)**”**

Otherwise known as “[the most misread poem in America](https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/09/11/the-most-misread-poem-in-america/).” See also: “[Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42891/stopping-by-woods-on-a-snowy-evening).” And “[Birches](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44260/birches).” All begin in delight and end in wisdom, as Frost taught us great poems should.

**Gwendolyn Brooks, “**[**We Real Cool**](https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/we-real-cool)**”**

This blew my mind in high school, and I [wasn’t the only one](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/brooks/werealcool.htm).

**Elizabeth Bishop, “**[**One Art**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47536/one-art)**”**

Bishop’s much loved and [much discussed](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/bishop/oneart.htm) ode to loss, which [Claudia Roth Pierpont called](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/06/elizabeth-bishops-art-of-losing) “a triumph of control, understatement, wit. Even of self-mockery, in the poetically pushed rhyme word “vaster,” and the ladylike, pinkies-up “shan’t.” An exceedingly rare mention of her mother—as a woman who once owned a watch. A continent standing in for losses larger than itself.”

**Emily Dickinson, “**[**Because I could not stop for Death –**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47652/because-i-could-not-stop-for-death-479)**”**

The truth is, there are lots of [equally iconic Dickinson poems](https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/tip-sheet/article/67591-the-10-best-emily-dickinson-poems.html), so consider this a stand-in for them all. Though, as Jay Parini [has noted](https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2011/mar/11/best-american-poems), this poem is perfect, “one of Dickinson’s most compressed and chilling attempts to come to terms with mortality.”

**Langston Hughes, “**[**Harlem**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem)**”**

One of the defining works of the Harlem Renaissance, by its greatest poet. It also, of course, gave inspiration and lent a title to another literary classic: Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun.

**Sylvia Plath, “**[**Daddy**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48999/daddy-56d22aafa45b2)**”**

To be quite honest, my favorite Plath poem is “[The Applicant](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57419/the-applicant).” But “Daddy” is still the most iconic, especially if you’ve ever heard her [read it aloud](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hHjctqSBwM).

**Robert Hayden, “**[**Middle Passage**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43076/middle-passage)**“**

The most famous poem, and a terribly beautiful one, by our country’s first African-American Poet Laureate (though the position was then called Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress). See also: “[Those Winter Sundays](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46461/those-winter-sundays), which despite what I wrote above may be equally as famous.”

**Wallace Stevens, “**[**Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45236/thirteen-ways-of-looking-at-a-blackbird)**”**

This one takes the cake for the sheer number of “thirteen ways of looking at x” knockoffs that I’ve seen. But please see also: “[The Emperor of Ice-Cream](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45234/the-emperor-of-ice-cream).”

**Allen Ginsberg, “**[**Howl**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl)**“**

With On the Road, the most enduring piece of literature from the mythologized Beat Generation, and of the two, the better one. Even the least literate of your friends would probably recognize the line “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness . . .”

**Maya Angelou, “**[**Still I Rise**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46446/still-i-rise)**“**

So iconic, it was a [Google Doodle](https://www.google.com/doodles/dr-maya-angelous-90th-birthday).

**Dylan Thomas, “**[**Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night**](https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/do-not-go-gentle-good-night)**”**

I mean, have you seen Interstellar? (Or Dangerous Minds or Independence Day?)

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “**[**Kubla Khan**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43991/kubla-khan)**”**

Or Citizen Kane? (See also: “[The Rime of the Ancient Mariner](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43997/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner-text-of-1834).”)

**Percy Bysshe Shelley, “**[**Ozymandias**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46565/ozymandias)**“**

. . . or Breaking Bad?

**Edgar Allan Poe, “**[**The Raven**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48860/the-raven-5964f5014d47a)**”**

We had some votes for “[Annabel Lee](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44885/annabel-lee),” on account of its earworminess, but among the [many appearances](https://lithub.com/a-brief-and-incomplete-survey-of-edgar-allan-poes-in-pop-culture/) and references of Poe in pop culture, “The Raven” is certainly the most common.

**Louise Glück, “**[**Mock Orange**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49601/mock-orange)**“**

One of those poems passed hand to hand between undergraduates who will grow up to become writers.

**Paul Laurence Dunbar, “**[**We Wear the Mask**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44203/we-wear-the-mask)**“**

Dunbar’s most famous poem, and arguably his best, which biographer [Paul Revell described](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/dunbar/mask.htm) as “a moving cry from the heart of suffering. The poem anticipates, and presents in terms of passionate personal regret, the psychological analysis of the fact of blackness in Frantz Fanon’s *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs,*with a penetrating insight into the reality of the black man’s plight in America.”

**e.e. cummings, “**[**i carry your heart with me**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/49493/i-carry-your-heart-with-mei-carry-it-in)**“**

As quoted at many, many weddings.

**Marianne Moore, “**[**Poetry**](https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/poetry)**“**

All else aside, the fact that it starts with hating poetry has made it a favorite among schoolchildren of all ages. See also: “[The Fish](https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/fish-1).”

**Rudyard Kipling, “**[**If**](https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/if%E2%80%94)**“**

According to someone in the Literary Hub office who would know, this poem is all over sports stadiums and locker rooms. [Serena Williams is into it](http://www.espn.com/espnw/culture/the-buzz/article/18853752/serena-williams-recites-rudyard-kipling-poem-international-women-day), which is proof enough for me.

**Gertrude Stein, “**[**Sacred Emily**](http://www.lettersofnote.com/p/sacred-emily-by-gertrude-stein.html)**“**

Because a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.

**William Blake, “**[**The Tyger**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43687/the-tyger)**”**

Tyger, tyger, burning bright . . . Blake famously wrote music to go along with his poems—the originals have been lost, but this verse has been widely interpreted by musicians as well as repeated to many sleepy children.

**Robert Burns, “**[**To a Mouse**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43816/to-a-mouse-56d222ab36e33)**“**

As (further) immortalized by John Steinbeck.

**Walt Whitman, “**[**Song of Myself**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45477/song-of-myself-1892-version)**”**

The most famous poem from Whitman’s celebrated Leaves of Grass, and selected by Jay Parini as [the best American poem of all time](https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2011/mar/11/best-american-poems). “Whitman reinvents American poetry in this peerless self-performance,” Parini writes, “finding cadences that seem utterly his own yet somehow keyed to the energy and rhythms of a young nation waking to its own voice and vision. He calls to every poet after him, such as Ezra Pound, who notes in [“A Pact”](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-pact/) that Whitman “broke the new wood.””

**Philip Larkin, “**[**This Be The Verse**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48419/this-be-the-verse)**“**

We know, we know, it’s all your parents’ fault.

**William Shakespeare, “**[**Sonnet 18**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45087/sonnet-18-shall-i-compare-thee-to-a-summers-day)**” (“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”)**

Like Dickinson, we could have put several of Shakespeare’s sonnets in this slot. Most people only recognize the first couplets anyway.

**Audre Lorde, “**[**Power**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/53918/power-56d233adafeb3)**“**

A uniquely American poem, written in 1978, that should be outdated by now, but still is not.

**Frank O’Hara, “**[**Meditations in an Emergency**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/26538/meditations-in-an-emergency)**“**

Courtesy Don Draper, circa season 2.

**John McCrae, “**[**In Flanders Fields**](https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/flanders-fields)**“**

Probably the most iconic—and most quoted—poem from WWI. Particularly popular in Canada, where McCrae is from.

**Lewis Carroll, “**[**Jabberwocky**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42916/jabberwocky)**“**

Still the most iconic nonsense poem ever written.

**W. B. Yeats, “**[**The Second Coming**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43290/the-second-coming)**“**

Otherwise known as “[the most thoroughly pillaged piece of literature in English](https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/04/07/no-slouch/).” Just ask our hero Joan Didion. Joan knows what’s up.

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One more thing. The above list is too white and male and old, because our literary iconography is still too white and male and old. So, here are some other poems that we here at the Literary Hub office also consider iconic, though they are perhaps not as widely anthologized/quoted/referenced/used to amp up the corny drama in films as some of the above (yet).

**Adrienne Rich, “**[**Diving into the Wreck**](https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/diving-wreck)**”**

One of my very favorites from Rich’s rich (sorry) oeuvre. I read it in college and have been quoting it ever since.

**Patricia Lockwood, “**[**Rape Joke**](https://www.theawl.com/2013/07/patricia-lockwood-rape-joke/)**“**

The poem that officially broke the internet in 2013.

**Lucille Clifton, “**[**Homage to My Hips**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49487/homage-to-my-hips)**“**

She’s just . . . so . . . damn . . . sexy. See also: “[To a Dark Moses](https://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/lucille-clifton/to-a-dark-moses/)” and “[won’t you celebrate with me](https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/wont-you-celebrate-me),” because Clifton is the greatest.

**Lucie Brock-Broido, “**[**Am Moor**](http://www.randomhouse.com/knopf/authors/brock-broido/poem.html)**“**

This happens to be my own personal favorite Brock-Broido poem, though almost any would do here.