Name:

AP English 11

***Thanatopsis*/Shift and Tone**

**Directions**: As you read this poem by William Cullen Bryant, look for significant shifts within the passage, along with changes in the author’s attitude.

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| William Cullen Bryant. 1794–1878 |
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| **Thanatopsis** |
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| TO HIM who in the love of Nature holds |  |
| Communion with her visible forms, she speaks |  |
| A various language; for his gayer hours |  |
| She has a voice of gladness, and a smile |  |
| And eloquence of beauty, and she glides | *5* |
| Into his darker musings, with a mild |  |
| And healing sympathy, that steals away |  |
| Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When thoughts |  |
| Of the last bitter hour come like a blight |  |
| Over thy spirit, and sad images | *10* |
| Of the stern agony, and shroud, and pall, |  |
| And breathless darkness, and the narrow house, |  |
| Make thee to shudder, and grow sick at heart;— |  |
| Go forth under the open sky, and list |  |
| To Nature's teachings, while from all around— | *15* |
| Earth and her waters, and the depths of air— |  |
| Comes a still voice—Yet a few days, and thee |  |
| The all-beholding sun shall see no more |  |
| In all his course; nor yet in the cold ground, |  |
| Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears, | *20* |
| Nor in the embrace of ocean, shall exist |  |
| Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim |  |
| Thy growth, to be resolved to earth again, |  |
| And, lost each human trace, surrendering up |  |
| Thine individual being, shalt thou go | *25* |
| To mix forever with the elements; |  |
| To be a brother to the insensible rock, |  |
| And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain |  |
| Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak |  |
| Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould. | *30* |
| Yet not to thine eternal resting-place |  |
| Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish |  |
| Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down |  |
| With patriarchs of the infant world,—with kings, |  |
| The powerful of the earth,—the wise, the good, | *35* |
| Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past, |  |
| All in one mighty sepulchre. The hills |  |
| Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun; the vales |  |
| Stretching in pensive quietness between; |  |
| The venerable woods—rivers that move | *40* |
| In majesty, and the complaining brooks |  |
| That make the meadows green; and, poured round all, |  |
| Old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste,— |  |
| Are but the solemn decorations all |  |
| Of the great tomb of man! The golden sun, | *45* |
| The planets, all the infinite host of heaven, |  |
| Are shining on the sad abodes of death, |  |
| Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread |  |
| The globe are but a handful to the tribes |  |
| That slumber in its bosom.—Take the wings | *50* |
| Of morning, pierce the Barcan wilderness, |  |
| Or lose thyself in the continuous woods |  |
| Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound, |  |
| Save his own dashings,—yet the dead are there: |  |
| And millions in those solitudes, since first | *55* |
| The flight of years began, have laid them down |  |
| In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone. |  |
| So shalt thou rest; and what if thou withdraw |  |
| In silence from the living, and no friend |  |
| Take note of thy departure? All that breathe | *60* |
| Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh |  |
| When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care |  |
| Plod on, and each one as before will chase |  |
| His favorite phantom; yet all these shall leave |  |
| Their mirth and their employments, and shall come | *65* |
| And make their bed with thee. As the long train |  |
| Of ages glide away, the sons of men, |  |
| The youth in life's green spring, and he who goes |  |
| In the full strength of years, matron and maid, |  |
| The speechless babe, and the gray-headed man— | *70* |
| Shall one by one be gathered to thy side |  |
| By those, who in their turn shall follow them. |  |
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| So live, that when thy summons comes to join |  |
| The innumerable caravan which moves |  |
| To that mysterious realm, where each shall take | *75* |
| His chamber in the silent halls of death, |  |
| Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night, |  |
| Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed |  |
| By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave |  |
| Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch | *80* |
| About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams. |  |

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| AUTHOR: | Lounsbury, Thomas R., ed., 1838–1915. |
| TITLE: | [Yale Book of American Verse](http://www.bartleby.com/102/); ed. by Thomas Raynesford Lounsbury. |
| PUBLISHED: | New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912. |
| PHYSICAL DETAILS: | lviii p., 1 l., 570 p. 21 cm. |
| ISBN: | 1-58734-031-3. |
| CITATION: | Lounsbury, Thomas R., ed. *Yale Book of American Verse.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912; Bartleby.com, 1999. [www.bartleby.com/102/](http://www.bartleby.com/102/). [Date of Printout]. |
| ON-LINE ED.: | Published January 1999 by [Bartleby.com](http://www.bartleby.com/); © Copyright Bartleby.com, Inc. ([Terms of Use](http://www.bartleby.com/sv/terms.html)). |