

# Texts for Class 6: Surprised by Joy

## E. E. Cummings: "I thank you God" (1950)

i thank You God for most this amazing  
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,  
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth  
day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay  
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any—lifted from the no  
of all nothing—human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

## Mary Oliver: Don't Hesitate (1991)

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy,  
don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty  
of lives and whole towns destroyed or about  
to be. We are not wise, and not very often  
kind. And much can never be redeemed.  
Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this  
is its way of fighting back, that sometimes  
something happens better than all the riches  
or power in the world. It could be anything,  
but very likely you notice it in the instant  
when love begins. Anyway, that's often the  
case. Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid  
of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.

## Mary Oliver: When Death Comes (2005)

When death comes like the hungry bear in autumn;  
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse  
to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;  
when death comes like the measles-pox  
when death comes like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,  
I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:  
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?  
And therefore I look upon everything  
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,  
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,  
and I consider eternity as another possibility,  
and I think of each life as a flower, as common  
as a field daisy, and as singular,  
and each name a comfortable music in the mouth,  
tending, as all music does, toward silence,  
and each body a lion of courage, and something  
precious to the earth.  
When it's over, I want to say all my life  
I was a bride married to amazement.  
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.  
When it's over, I don't want to wonder  
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.  
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened, or full of argument.  
I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

## Seamus Heaney: Postscript (1996)

And some time make the time to drive out west  
Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,  
In September or October, when the wind  
And the light are working off each other  
So that the ocean on one side is wild  
With foam and glitter, and inland among stones  
The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit  
By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,

Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,  
Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads  
Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.  
Useless to think you'll park and capture it  
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,  
A hurry through which known and strange things pass  
As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways  
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.

Seamus Heaney: *A Kite for Aibhin* (2013)  
after "L'Acquilone" by Giovanni Pascoli

Air from another life and time and place,  
Pale blue heavenly air is supporting  
A white wing beating high against the breeze,

And yes, it is a kite! As when one afternoon  
All of us there trooped out  
Among the briar hedges and stripped thorn,

I take my stand again, halt opposite  
Anahorish Hill to scan the blue,  
Back in that field to launch our long-tailed comet.

And now it hovers, tugs, veers, dives askew,  
Lifts itself, goes with the wind until  
It rises to loud cheers from us below.

Rises, and my hand is like a spindle  
Unspooling, the kite a thin-stemmed flower  
Climbing and carrying, carrying farther, higher

The longing in the breast and planted feet  
And gazing face and heart of the kite flier  
Until string breaks and—separate, elate—

The kite takes off, itself alone, a windfall.

## Helen Dunmore: "My life's stem was cut" (2016)

My life's stem was cut,  
But quickly, lovingly  
I was lifted up,  
I heard the rush of the tap  
And I was set in water  
In the blue vase, beautiful  
In lip and curve,  
And here I am  
Opening one petal  
As the tea cools.  
I wait while the sun moves  
And the bees finish their dancing,  
I know I am dying  
But why not keep flowering  
As long as I can  
From my cut stem?