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The Arrow and the Song

Henry Wordsworth Longfellow

I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For so swiftly it flew, the sight,
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For who has sight so keen and strong
That it can follow the flight of song?

Long, long afterward, in an oak,
I found the arrow, still unbroke;
And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend.

Degree of Difficulty: 3

At the Garden Gate

David McCord

Who so late
At the garden gate?
Emily, Kate,
And John.
“John,
Where have you been?
It’s after six;
Supper is on,
And you’ve been gone
An hour,
John!”

We’ve been, we’ve been,
We’ve just been over
The field,” said,
John.
(Emily, Kate, and John)
Why so late
At the garden gate?
Emily, Kate
And John.
“John,
What have you got?”
“A whopping toad
Isn’t he big?”

At the Garden Gate (Continued)

He's a terrible
Load.

(We found him
A little ways
Up the road,"
Said Emily,
Kate,
And John.)

Who so late
At the garden gate?
Emily, Kate,
And John.
"John,
Put that thing down!

Do you want to get warts?"
(They are three have 'em
By last
reports.)
Still, finding toads.
Is the best of
Sports.
Say Emily,
Kate,
And John.

Degree of Difficulty: 3

The Balloon

Karla Kuskin

I went to the park
And I bought a balloon.
It sailed through the sky
Like a large orange moon.
It bumped and it fluttered
And swam with the clouds.
Small birds flew around it,
In high chirping crowds.
It bounced and it balanced
And bowed with the breeze.
It skimmed past the leaves
On the tops of the trees.
And then as the day
Started turning to night
I gave a short jump
And i held the string tight
And home we all sailed
Through the darkening sky,
The orange balloon, the small birds,
And I.

Degree of Difficulty: 4

Bedtime

Eleanor Farjeon

Five minutes, five minutes more please!

Let me stay five minutes more!

Can't I just finish the castle

I'm building here on the floor?

Can't I just finish the story

I'm reading here in my book?

Can't I just finish this bead-chain--

It is almost finished, look!

Can't I just finish this game, please!

When a game's once begun

It's a pity never to find out

Whether you've lost or won.

Can't I just stay five minutes?

Well, can't I just stay four?

Three minutes then? Two minutes?

Can I stay one minute more?

Degree of Difficulty: 3

Bernard Bartholomew Benjamin Brown

Carolyn Cawthorne

Bernard Bartholomew Benjamin Brown
Was really the dirtiest boy in town.
He'd play in the mud, and splash in the pool,
When starting out each morning for school.
His teacher said, with a sorry frown,
"You certainly are a disgrace to the town.
Bernard Bartholomew Benjamin Brown."

Bernard Bartholomew Benjamin Brown
Was caught, when policemen were searching the town
To find a bad boy. Said they: "Here's the scamp!
He surely looks like a wild little tramp!"
But as he stood trembling, with tears running down,
Said his clean little sister, in dainty pink gown,
"His name is Bernard Bartholomew Benjamin Brown!"

Bernard Bartholomew Benjamin Brown
Is now without spot, from his soles to his crown.
His shoes are polished--his suit is clean
A neater boy could never be seen.
And teacher says now with a smile, looking down:
"When you've grown, you'll be Mayor of the town,
Bernard Bartholomew Benjamin Brown."

Degree of Difficulty: 5

Boarding House

Ted Kooser

The blind man draws his curtains for the night
And goes to bed, leaving a burning light

Above the bathroom mirror. Through the wall,
He hears the deaf man walking down the hall

In his squeaky shoes to see if there's a light
Under the blind man's door, and all is right

Degree of Difficulty: 1

The Cat

Ogden Nash

You get a wife, you get a house,
Eventually you get a mouse.
You get some words regarding mice,
You get a kitty in a trice.

By two a.m. or thereabouts,
The mouse is in, the cat is out.
It dawns upon you, in your cot,
The mouse is silent, the cat is not.

Instead of kitty, says your spouse,
You should have got another mouse.

Degree of Difficulty: 3

Catalogue*Rosalie Moore*

Cats sleep fat and walk thin.
Cats, when they sleep, slump;
When they wake, pull in--
And where the plump's been
There's skin. Cats walk thin.

Cats wait in a lump,
Jump in a streak.
Cats when they jump, are sleek
As a grape slipping its skin--
They have technique.
Oh, cats don't creak.
They sneak.
Cats sleep fat.
They spread comfort beneath them
Like a good mat
As if they picked the place
And then sat.
You walk around one
As if he were the City Hall
After that.
When everyone else is just ready to go out,
The cat is just ready to come in.
He's not where he's been.
Cats sleep fast and walk thin.

Degree of Difficulty: 5

A Child's Evening Prayer

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Ere on my bed my limbs I lay,
God grant me grace my prayers to say:
O God! Preserve my mother dear
In strength and health for many a year;
And, O! Preserve my father too,
And may I pay him reverence due;

And may I my best thoughts employ
To be my parents' hope and joy;
And O! Preserve my brothers both
From evil doings and from sloth,

And may we always love each other
Our friends, our father, and our mother:
And still, O Lord, to me impart
An innocent and grateful heart,
That after my great sleep I may
Awake to thy eternal day! Amen

Degree of Difficulty: 5

Counting-Out Rhyme

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Silver bark of beech, and sallow
Bark of yellow birch and yellow
Twig of willow.

Stripe of green in moosewood maple,
Colour seen in leaf of apple,
Bark of popple.

Wood of popple pale as moonbeam,
Wook of oak for yoke and barn-beam,
Wood of hornbeam.

Silver bark of beech, and hollow
Stem of elder, tall and yellow
Twig of willow.

Degree of Difficulty: 4

A Day

Emily Dickinson

I'll tell you how the sun rose--
A ribbon at a time.
The steeples swam in amethyst,
The news like squirrels ran.

The hills untied their bonnets,
The bobolinks begun.
Then I said softly to myself,
"That must have been the sun!"

But how he set, I know not.
There seemed a purple stile
Which little yellow boys and girls
Were climbing all the while

Till when they reached the other side,
A dominie in gray
Put gently up the evening bars,
And led the flock away.

Degree of Difficulty: 5

Eletelephony

Laura E. Richards

Once there was an elephant,
Who tried to use the telephant--
No! No! I mean an elephone
Who tried to use the telephone
(Dear me! I am not certain quite
That even now I've got it right.)

Howe'er it was, he got his trunk
Entangled in the telephunk;
The more he tried to get it free,
The louder buzzed the telephee--
(I fear i'd better drop the song
Of elephop and telephong.)

Degree of Difficulty: 2

Going to Bed

Marchette Chute

I'm always told to hurry up--
Which I'd be glad to do,
If there were not so many things
That needed attending to

But first I have to find my towel
Which fell behind the rack
And when a pillow's thrown at me
I have to throw it back.

And then I have to get the things
I need in bed with me
Like marbles and my birthday train
And Pete the chimpanzee.

I have to see my polliwog
Is safely in its pan,
And stand a minute on my head
To be quite sure I can.

I have to bounce upon my bed
To see if it will sink
And then when I am covered up
I find I need a drink.

Degree of Difficulty: 3

Habits of the Hippopotamus

Arthur Guiterman

The hippopotamus is strong
And huge of head and bread of bustle;
The limbs on which he rolls along
Are big with hippopotomuscle.

He does not greatly care for seets
Like ice cream, apple pie, or custard,
But takes to flavor what he eats
A little hippopotomustard.

The hippopotamus is true
To all his principles, and just;
He always tries his best to do
The things one hippopotomust.

He never rides in trucks or trams,
In taxicabs or omnibuses,
And so keeps out of traffic jams
And other hippopotomusses.

Degree of Difficulty: 5

Halfway Down

A. A. Milne

Halfway down the stairs
Is a stair
Where I set.
There isn't any
Other stair
Quite like
It.
I'm not at the bottom
I'm not at the top
So this is the stair
Where
I always
Stop.
Halfway up the stairs
Isn't up,
And isn't down.
It isn't in the nursery,
It isn't in the town.
And all sorts of funny
Thoughts
Run round my head:
"It isn't really
Anywhere!
It's somewhere else
Instead!"

Degree of Difficulty: 3

If I can Stop One Heart from Breaking

Emily Dickinson

If I can stop one heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain,
If I can ease one life the aching
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Into his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.

Degree of Difficulty: 1

I Meant to Do My Work Today

Richard LeGallienne

I meant to do my work today--
But a brown bird sang in the apple tree,
And a butterfly flitted across the field,
And all the leaves were calling me.

And the wind went signing over the land,
Tossing the grasses to and fro,
And a rainbow held out its shining hand--
So what could I do but laugh and go?

Degree of Difficulty: 1

I'm Nobody! Who Are You?

Emily Dickinson

I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there's a pair of us--don't tell!
They'd banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the livelong day
To an admiring bog!

Degree of Difficulty: 1

In the Morning

Ralph Cushman

I met God in the morning,
When my day was at its best
And His presence came like sunrise
Like a glory in my breast.

All day long the Presence lingered.
All day long He stayed with me.
And we sailed with perfect calmness
O're a very troubled sea.

Other ships were blown and battered
Other ships were sore distressed.
But the winds that seemed to drive them
Brought to us a peace and rest.

Then I thought of other mornings
With a keen remorse of mind,
When I, too, had loosed the moorings
With the Presence left behind.

So I think I know the secret
Learned from many a troubled way.
You must seek God in the morning
If you want Him through the day.

Degree of Difficulty: 5

Jabbering in School

Eleanor Farjeon

Was that me jabbering?
I expect it was.
It's no use complaining
Why and because;
When you've been jabbering
Teacher doesn't try
To take any interest
In because and why.
I might have seen a heron
Flying in the sun,
Or been telling Jeanie
Her pinny was undone,
I might have been noticing
Something dark and dire,
Like lions in the playground,
Or the curtains on fire,
I might have had a stomachache--
Oh, there might have been
Lots of reasons why I
Was jabbering with Jean.
But it's not use explaining
Why and because.
Was that me jabbering?
I expect it was.

Degree of Difficulty: 5

A Kitten

Eleanor Farjeon

He's nothing much but fur
And two round eyes of blue,
He has a giant purr
And a midget mew.

He darts and pats the air,
He starts and cocks his ear,
When there is nothing there
For him to see and hear.

He runs around in rings,
But why we cannot tell;
With sideways leaps he springs
At things invisible.

Then halfway through a leap
His startled eyeballs close,
And he drops off to sleep
With one paw on his nose.

Degree of Difficulty: 4

A Little Bird I Am

Louisa May Alcott

'A little bird I am,
Shut from the fields of air,
And in my cage I sit and sing
To Him who placed me there:
Well pleased a prisoner to be,
Because, my God, it pleases Thee!

'Naught have I else to do;
I sing the whole day long;
And He whom most I love to please
Doth listen to my song,
He caught and bound my wandering wing,
But still He bends to hear me sing.'

Degree of Difficulty: 3

Little Things

Julia A. Carney

Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean
And the beauteous land.

And the little moments,
Humble though they be,
Make the mighty ages
Of eternity.

So our little errors
Lead the soul away,
From the paths of virtue
Into sin to stray

Little deeds of kindness,
Little words of love,
Make our earth an Eden,
Like the heaven above.

Degree of Difficulty: 3

The Little Whistler

Frances Frost

My mother whistled softly,
My father whistled bravely,
My brother whistled merrily.
And I tried all day long!
I blew my breath inwards,
I blew my breath outwards,
But all you heard was breath blowing
And not a bit of song!

But today I heard a bluebird,
A happy, young and new bird,
Whistling in the apple tree,
He'd just discovered how!
Then quick I blew my breath in,
And happy I blew my breath out,
And sudden I blew three wild notes--
And I can whistle now!

Degree of Difficulty: 4

Missing

A. A. Milne

Has anybody seen my mouse?
I opened his box for half a minute,
Just to make sure he was really in it,
And while I was looking, he jumped outside!
I tried to catch him, I tried, I tried.
I think he's somewhere about the house.
Has anyone seen my mouse?
Uncle John have you seen my mouse?
Just a small sort of mouse, a dear little brown one,
He came from the country, he wasn't a town one,
So he'll feel lonely in a London street;
Why, what could he possibly find to eat?
He must be somewhere. I'll ask Aunt Rose:
Have you seen a mouse with a woffelly nose?
Oh, somewhere about--
He's just got out...
Hasn't anybody seen my mouse?

Degree of Difficulty: 4

My Cat, Mrs. Lick-A-Chin

John Ciardi

Some of the cats I know about
Spend a little time in and a lot of time out.
Or a lot of time out and a little time in.
But my cat, Mrs. Lick-a-Chin,
Never knows where she wants to be.
If I let her in, she looks at me
And begins to sing that she wants to go out.
So I open the door, and she looks about
And begins to sing, "Please let me in!"

Poor silly Mrs. Lick-a-Chin!

The thing about cats, as you may find,
Is that no one knows what they have in mind.
And I'll tell you something about that:
No one knows it less than my cat.

Degree of Difficulty: 3

Ornithology*Eleanor Farjeon*

What's ornithology? Pray can you tell?
It's hard to pronounce and it's harder to spell--
Yet that's what you're learning whenever you care

To study the Birds of the Earth, Sea, and Air.
There's a long word
To stand for a Bird!
For a Lark or a Sparrow its length is absurd!
Eagles and Ostriches need no apology

If you should label them as ornithology!
But how can it fit
The tiny Tom-Tit?
The Finch.

Wants a word that's no more than an inch!
Yet all the Birds of the East and the West,

Whatever they be, and wherever they nest--
The Vulture-the Hen--
The Flamingo--the Wren--
The Dove--the Canary--
The queer Cassowary

The Thrush on the bough, and the Duck in the pool--
They are all ornithology when you're in School!

Degree of Difficulty: 5

Out in the Fields with God

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The little cares that fretted me
I lost them yesterday
Among the fields, above the sea,
Among the winds at play,
Among the lowing of the herds,
The rustling of the trees,
Among the singing of the birds,
The humming of the bees.

The foolish fears of what might happen,
I cast them all away,
Among the clover-scented grass,
Among the new-mown hay,
Among the husking of the corn,
Where drowsy poppies nod,
Where ill thoughts die and good are born--
Out in the fields with God.

Degree of Difficulty: 4

Questions at Night

Louis Untermeyer

Why
Is the sky?

What starts the thunder overhead?
Who makes the crashing noise?
Are the angels falling out of bed?
Are they breaking all their toys?

Why does the sun go down so soon?
Why do the night-clouds crawl
Hungrily up to the new-laid moon
And swallow it, shell and all?

If there's a Bear among the stars
As all the people say,
Won't he jump over those Pasture-bars
And drink up the Milky Way?

Does every star that happens to fall
Turn into a fire-fly?
Can't it ever get back to heaven at all?

And why
Is the sky?

Degree of Difficulty: 4

Rain in Summer

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

How beautiful is the rain!
After the dust and heat,
In the broad and fiery street,
In the narrow lane,
How beautiful is the rain!
How it clatters along the roofs,
Like the tramp of hoofs!

How it gushes and struggles out
From the throat of the overflowing spout!
Across the window pane
It pours and pours;
And swift and wide,
With muddy tide,
Like a river down the gutter roars
The rain, the welcome rain!

Degree of Difficulty: 3

The Reason for the Pelican

John Ciardi

The reason for the pelican
Is difficult to see:
His beak is clearly larger
Than there's any need to be.

It's not to bail a boat with--
He doesn't own a boat.
Yet everywhere he takes himself
He has that beak to tote.

It's not to keep his wife in--
His wife had got one, too.
It's not a scoop for eating soup.
It's not an extra shoe.

It isn't quite for anything.
And yet you realize
It's really quite a splendid beak
In quite a splendid size.

Degree of Difficulty: 4

Seal

William Jay Smith

See how he dives
From the rocks with a zoom!
See how he darts
Through his watery room
Past crabs and eels
And green seaweed,
Past fluffs of sandy
Minnow feed!
See how he swims
With a swerve and a twist,
A flip of the flipper,
A flick of the wrist!
Quicksilver quick,
Softer than spray,
Down he plunges
And sweeps away;
Before you can think,
Before you can utter
Words like "Dill pickle"
Or "Apple butter,"

Seal (Continued)

Back up he swims
Past sting-ray and shark,
Out with a zoom,
A whoop, a bark;
Before you can say
Whatever you wish,
He plops at your side
With a mouthful of fish!

Degree of Difficulty: 4

The Things I Do

Karla Kuskin

I'm very good at climbing
I nearly climbed a tree
But just as I was almost up
I sort of skinned my knee.

I'm wonderful at walking
I almost walked a mile
But when I got around the block
I rested for a while.

I'm excellent at swimming
Though I'm not very old
I almost swam the ocean once
But the water was too cold.

But what I'm really best at
Is skipping down the hall.
I'm very good at skipping.
I'm wonderful at skipping.
I'm marvelous at skipping,
That is unless I fall.

Degree of Difficulty: 3

Timothy Boon

Ivy O. Eastwick

Timothy Boon
Bought a balloon
Blue as the sky,
Round as the moon.
“Now I will try
To make it fly
Up to the moon,
Higher than high!”
Timothy said,
Nodding his head.

Timothy Boon
Sent his balloon
Up through the skies,
Up to the moon.
But a strong breeze
Stirred in the trees
Rocked the bright moon,
Tossed the great seas,
And, with its mirth,
Shook the whole earth.

Timothy Boon,
And his balloon,
Caught by the breeze

Timothy Boon (Continued)

Flew to the moon;
Up past the trees,
Over the seas,
Up to the moon--
Swift as you please!--
And, oh, I forget,
They have not come down yet!

Degree of Difficulty: 3

Classical Christian Speech Meet

Tiptoe

Karla Kuskin

Yesterday I skipped all day,
The day before I ran,
Today I'm going to tiptoe
Everywhere I can.

I'll tiptoe down the stairway.
I'll tiptoe through the door.
I'll tiptoe to the living room
And give an awful roar

And my father, who is reading,
Will jump up from his chair
And mumble something silly like
"I don't see you there."

I'll tiptoe through the meadows,
Over hills and yellow sands
And when my toes get tired
Then I'll tiptoe on my hands.

Degree of Difficulty: 3

To God, with Love

Alice Joyce Davidson

Dear God,
This is the first time ever that
I've written You a letter...but I just had
To thank You, now that everything is better.

I came to You a while back so troubled
And distressed, I didn't know what course to
Take, what action would be best...I told You
All my troubles, and I felt Your presence near...
And as I talked the clouds broke up and seemed
To disappear.

So, thank You, God, for listening, for
Keeping me from harm, for wiping tears and
Holding me within Your loving arms.

Degree of Difficulty: 3

Verbs

Eleanor Farjeon

Nouns are the things I see and touch,
My Cake, my Mother, and my Ball;
I like some nouns very much,
Though some I do not like at all.

Verbs are the the things I do, and make,
And feel, in one way or another.
Thanks to Verbs, I eat my Cake,
And throw my Ball, and hug my Mother.

Yet Verbs, which make me laugh and play,
Can also make me cry and fall.
And tease my Mother every day,
And spoil my Cake, and lose my Ball!

Degree of Difficulty: 3

Weather

Eve Merriam

Dot a dotdot...dot a dotdot
Spotting the windowpane.
Spack a spack speck...flick a flack fleck
Freckling the windowpane.

A spatter a scatter...a wetcat a clatter
A splatter a rumble outside.
Umbrella umbrella umbrella umbrella
Bumbershoot barrel of rain.

Slosh a galosh...slosh a galosh
Slither and slather a glide
A puddle a jump a puddle a jump
A puddle a jump puddle splosh
A juddle a pump aluddle a dump a
Puddmuddle jump in and slide!

Degree of Difficulty: 4

What is Pink?

Christina Rossetti

What is pink? A rose is pink
By the fountain's brink.
What is red? A poppy's red
In its barley bed.
What is blue? The sky is blue
Where the clouds float through.
What is white? A swan is white
Sailing in the light.
What is yellow? Pears are yellow.
Rich and ripe and mellow.
What is green? The grass is green,
With small flowers between.
What is violet? Clouds are violet
In the summer twilight.
What is orange? Why, an orange,
Just an orange!

Degree of Difficulty: 3

Will There Really Be a Morning?

Emily Dickenson

Will there really be a morning?
Is there such a thing as day?
Could i see it from the mountains
If I were as tall as they?

Has it feet like water lilies?
Has it feathers like a bird?
Is it brought from famous countries
Of which I have never heard?

Oh, some scholar! Oh, some sailor!
Oh, some wise man from the skies!
Please to tell a little pilgrim
Where the place called morning lies!

Degree of Difficulty: 3