

## 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Poetry Resources – Trinity Academy

**6<sup>th</sup> grade – 350-500 words**

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## **The Fish**

*Elizabeth Bishop*

I caught a tremendous fish  
and held him beside the boat  
half out of water, with my hook  
fast in a corner of his mouth  
He didn't fight.  
He hadn't fought at all.  
He hung a grunting weight,  
battered and venerable  
and homely. Here and there  
his brown skin hung in strips  
like ancient wallpaper,  
and its pattern of darker brown  
was like wallpaper:  
shapes like full-blown roses  
stained and lost through age.  
He was speckled with barnacles,  
fine rosettes of lime,  
and infested  
with tiny white sea-lice,  
and underneath two or three  
rags of green weed hung down.  
While his gills were breathing in  
the terrible oxygen  
- the frightening gills,  
fresh and crisp with blood,  
that can cut so badly-  
I thought of the coarse white flesh  
Packed in like feathers,  
the big bones and the little bones,  
the dramatic reds and blacks  
of his shiny entrails,  
and the pink swim-bladder

like a big peony.

I looked into his eyes  
which were far larger than mine  
but shallower, and yellowed,  
the irises backed and packed  
with tarnished tinfoil  
seen through the lenses  
of old scratched isinglass.

They shifted a little, but not  
to return my stare.

- It was more like the tipping  
of an object toward the light.

I admired his sullen face,  
the mechanism of his jaw,  
and then I saw

that from his lower lip - if you could call it a lip  
grim, wet, and weaponlike,  
hung five old pieces of fish-line,  
or four and a wire leader  
with the swivel still attached,  
with all their five big hooks  
grown firmly in his mouth.

A green line, frayed at the end  
where he broke it, two heavier lines,  
and a fine black thread  
still crimped from the strain and snap  
when it broke and he got away.

Like medals with their ribbons  
frayed and wavering,  
a five-haired beard of wisdom  
trailing from his aching jaw.

I stared and stared  
and victory filled up  
the little rented boat,  
from the pool of bilge

where oil had spread a rainbow  
around the rusted engine  
to the bailer rusted orange,  
the sun-cracked thwarts,  
the oarlocks on their strings,  
the gunnels- until everything  
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!  
And I let the fish go.

*(375 words)*

## **The Wind and the Moon**

*George Macdonald*

Said the Wind to the Moon, "I will blow you out,  
    You stare  
    In the air  
    Like a ghost in a chair,  
Always looking what I am about—  
I hate to be watched; I'll blow you out."

The Wind blew hard, and out went the Moon.  
    So, deep  
    On a heap  
    Of clouds to sleep,  
Down lay the Wind, and slumbered soon,  
Muttering low, "I've done for that Moon."

He turned in his bed; she was there again!  
    On high  
    In the sky,  
    With her one ghost eye,  
The Moon shone white and alive and plain.  
Said the Wind, "I will blow you out again."

The Wind blew hard, and the Moon grew dim.  
    "With my sledge,  
    And my wedge,  
    I have knocked off her edge!  
If only I blow right fierce and grim,  
The creature will soon be dimmer than dim."

He blew and he blew, and she thinned to a thread.  
    "One puff  
    More's enough  
    To blow her to snuff!

One good puff more where the last was bred,  
And glimmer, glimmer, glum will go the thread."

He blew a great blast, and the thread was gone  
    In the air  
    Nowhere  
    Was a moonbeam bare;  
Far off and harmless the shy stars shone—  
Sure and certain the Moon was gone!

The Wind he took to his revels once more;  
    On down,  
    In town,  
    Like a merry-mad clown,  
He leaped and halloed with whistle and roar—  
"What's that?" The glimmering thread once more!

He flew in a rage—he danced and blew;  
    But in vain  
    Was the pain  
    Of his bursting brain;  
For still the broader the Moon-scap grew,  
The broader he swelled his big cheeks and blew.

Slowly she grew—till she filled the night,  
    And shone  
    On her throne  
    In the sky alone,  
A matchless, wonderful silvery light,  
Radiant and lovely, the queen of the night.

Said the Wind: "What a marvel of power am I  
    With my breath,  
    Good faith!  
    I blew her to death—

First blew her away right out of the sky—  
Then blew her in; what strength have I!"

But the Moon she knew nothing about the affair;

For high

In the sky,

With her one white eye,

Motionless, miles above the air,

She had never heard the great Wind blare.

*(378 words)*

**Barbara Frietchie (pronounced Fritchee)**

*John Greenleaf Whittier*

Up from the meadows rich with corn,  
Clear in the cool September morn,

The clustered spires of Frederick stand  
Green-walled by the hills of Maryland.

Round about them orchards sweep,  
Apple and peach tree fruited deep,

Fair as the garden of the Lord  
To the eyes of the famished rebel horde,

On that pleasant morn of the early fall  
When Lee marched over the mountain wall,—

Over the mountain, winding down,  
Horse and foot into Frederick town.

Forty flags with their silver stars,  
Forty flags with their crimson bars,

Flapped in the morning wind; the sun  
Of noon looked down, and saw not one.

Up rose old Barbara Frietchie then,  
Bowed with her fourscore years and ten;

Bravest of all in Frederick town,  
She took up the flag the men hauled down;

In her attic-window the staff she set,  
To show that one heart was loyal yet.

Up the street came the rebel tread,  
Stonewall Jackson riding ahead.

Under his slouched hat, left and right  
He glanced: the old flag met his sight.

“Halt!”—the dust-brown ranks stood fast.  
“Fire!”—out blazed the rifle-blast.

It shivered the window, pane and sash;  
It rent the banner with seam and gash.

Quick, as it fell, from the broken staff  
Dame Barbara snatched the silken scarf;

She leaned far out on the window-sill,  
And shook it forth with a royal will.

“Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,  
But spare your country’s flag,” she said.

A shade of sadness, a blush of shame,  
Over the face of the leader came,

The nobler nature within him stirred  
To life at that woman’s deed and word:

“Who touches a hair of yon gray head  
Dies like a dog! March on!” he said.

All day long through Frederick street  
Sounded the tread of marching feet:

All day long that free flag tost  
Over the head of the rebel host.

Ever its torn folds rose and fell  
On the loyal winds that loved it well;

And through the hill-gaps sunset light  
Shone over it with a warm good-night.

Barbara Frietchie's work is o'er,  
And the rebel rides on his raids no more.

Honor to her! and let a tear  
Fall, for her sake, on Stonewall's bier.

Over Barbara Frietchie's grave,  
Flag of freedom and union, wave!

Peace and order and beauty draw  
Round thy symbol of light and law;

And ever the stars above look down  
On thy stars below in Frederick town!

*(407 words)*

## **Birches**

*Robert Frost*

When I see birches bend to left and right  
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,  
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.  
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.  
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them  
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning  
After a rain. They click upon themselves  
As the breeze rises, and turn many-coloured  
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.  
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells  
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust  
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away  
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.  
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,  
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed  
So low for long, they never right themselves:  
You may see their trunks arching in the woods  
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground,  
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair  
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.  
But I was going to say when Truth broke in  
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm,  
I should prefer to have some boy bend them  
As he went out and in to fetch the cows—  
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,  
Whose only play was what he found himself,  
Summer or winter, and could play alone.  
One by one he subdued his father's trees  
By riding them down over and over again  
Until he took the stiffness out of them,  
And not one but hung limp, not one was left  
For him to conquer. He learned all there was

To learn about not launching out too soon  
And so not carrying the tree away  
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise  
To the top branches, climbing carefully  
With the same pains you use to fill a cup  
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.  
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,  
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.  
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.  
And so I dream of going back to be.  
It's when I'm weary of considerations,  
And life is too much like a pathless wood  
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs  
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
From a twig's having lashed across it open.  
I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
And then come back to it and begin over.  
May no fate willfully misunderstand me  
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away  
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:  
I don't know where it's likely to go better.  
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree  
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk  
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,  
But dipped its top and set me down again.  
That would be good both going and coming back.  
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

*(503 words)*

## **Daniel Boone**

*Arthur Guiterman*

Daniel boone at twenty-one  
Came with his tomahawk, knife, and gun  
Home from the French and Indian War  
To North Carolina and the Yadkin shore.  
He married his maid with a golden band,  
Builded his house and cleared his land;  
But the deep woods claimed their son again  
And he turned his face from the homes of men.  
Over the Blue Ridge, dark and lone,  
The Mountains of Iron, the Hills of Stone,  
Braving the Shawnee's jealous wrath,  
He made his way on the Warrior's Path.  
Alone he trod the shadowed trails;  
But he was lord of a thousand vales  
As he roved Kentucky, far and near,  
Hunting the buffalo, elk, and deer.  
What joy to see, what joy to win  
So fair a land for his kith and kin,  
Of streams unstained and woods unhewn!  
"Elbow room!" laughed Daniel Boone.

On the Wilderness Road that his axinen made  
The settlers flocked to the first stockade;  
The deerskin shirts and the coonskin caps  
Filed through the glens and the mountain gaps;  
And hearts were high in the fateful spring  
When the land said "Nay!" to the stubborn king.  
While the men of the East of farm and town  
Strove with the troops of the British Crown,  
Daniel Boone from a surge of hate  
Guarded a nation's westward gate.  
Down in the fort in a wave of flame

The Shawnee horde and the Mingo came,  
And the stout logs shook in a storm of lead;  
But Boone stood firm and the savage fled.  
Peace! And the settlers flocked anew,  
The farm lands spread, the town lands grew;  
But Daniel Boone was ill at ease  
When he saw the smoke in his forest trees.  
“There’ll be no game in the country soon.  
Elbow room!” cried Daniel Boone.

Straight as a pine at sixty-five—  
Time enough for a man to thrive—  
He launched his bateau on Ohio’s breast  
And his heart was glad as he oared it west;  
There was kindly folk and his own true blood  
Where great Missouri rolls his flood;  
New woods, new streams, and room to spare,  
And Daniel Boone found comfort there.  
Yet far he ranged toward the sunset still,  
Where the Kansas runs and the Smoky Hill,  
And the prairies toss, by the south wind blown;  
And he killed his bear on the Yellowstone.  
But ever he dreamed of new domains  
With vaster woods and wider plains;  
Ever he dreamed of a world-to-be  
Where there are no bounds and the soul is free.  
At fourscore-five, still stout and hale,  
He heard a call to a farther trail;  
So he turned his face where the stars are strewn;  
“Elbow room!” sighed Daniel Boone.

*(445 words)*

## **Mending Wall**

*Robert Frost*

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.  
The work of hunters is another thing:  
I have come after them and made repair  
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.  
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'  
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.  
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:  
There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors'.  
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
Where there are cows?  
But here there are no cows.

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down.' I could say '.Elves' to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself. I see him there  
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

*(387 words)*

## **Mother's Ugly Hands**

*Mary Mason*

When Jean was just a little girl  
She used to play for hours  
With tinker-Cat or Peter-Dog,  
Or help Mom with her flowers.  
But then sometimes her mom would stop  
The work she had to do  
To read to Jean or play with her;  
And as God planned, Jean grew.  
But then one day she realized  
Her mom was not the same  
As those of other little girls;  
And Jean grew up with shame,  
For Mother's hands were ugly hands,  
Misformed and scarred and red.  
And somehow love for Mother changed  
To selfishness and dread.  
Somehow she never asked her mom  
How those scares came to be,  
Too busy with the selfish fear  
That other eyes might see.  
But then one time Jean's grandma came  
With suitcase packed to stay,  
And it was at her grandma's feet  
The truth came out one day.  
"When you were just a tiny thing,  
About the age of two  
One day your clothing caught on fire,  
Though how we never knew;  
Your mother said she scarcely felt  
The searing tongues of flame,  
As with her hands she fought the fire.  
And that is how she came

To have the scars you hate so much;  
She did it all for you.  
You were not burned as bad as she,  
And so you never knew.”  
“Oh, Grandma, I am so ashamed!”  
And Jean began to weep.  
“To think my mother loved me so!”  
That night she couldn’t sleep  
And made her way to Mother’s room  
And in a rush of tears  
Received forgiveness for the hate  
She harbored all those years.  
That’s how it is with Mother love;  
Of death it’s unafraid.  
So very much like dying love  
On Calvary’s hill portrayed.  
Our Jesus too, bears ugly marks  
Of suffering and of pain.  
He did it all for you and me,  
But it was not in vain.  
For, as we view His suffering,  
We, too, must cry, “Forgive!”  
For only through His dying love  
Are we prepared to live.  
I’m thankful, God, for Mother love  
Which bravely fought the fire,  
And for my Jesus’ dying love  
Which—that love did inspire.

*(355 words)*

## **The Spider and the Fly**

*Mary Howitt*

“Will you walk into my parlor?” said the Spider to the Fly,  
‘Tis the prettiest little parlor that ever you did spy.  
The way into my parlor is up a winding stair,  
And I have many curious things to show when you are there.”  
“Oh no, no,” said the little Fly, “to ask me is in vain,  
For who goes up your winding stair can ne’er come down again.”

“I’m sure you must be weary, dear, with soaring up so high;  
Will you rest upon my little bed?” said the Spider to the Fly.  
“There are pretty curtains drawn around, the sheets are fine and thin;  
And if you like to rest awhile, I’ll snugly tuck you in!”  
“Oh no, no,” said the little Fly, “for I’ve often heard it said,  
They never, never wake up again, who sleep upon your bed!”

Said the cunning Spider to the Fly, “Dear friend, what can I do,  
To prove the warm affection I’ve always felt for you?  
I have within my pantry good store of all that’s nice;  
I’m sure you’re very welcome—will you please to take a slice?”  
“Oh no, no,” said the little Fly, “kind sir, that cannot be,  
I’ve heard what’s in your pantry, and I do not wish to see.”

“Sweet creature,” said Spider, “you’re witty and you’re wise;  
How handsome are your gauzy wings, how brilliant are your eyes!  
I have a little looking-glass upon my parlour shelf,  
If you’ll step in a moment dear, you shall behold yourself.”  
“I thank you gentle sir,” she said, “for what you’re pleased to say,  
And bidding you good morning now, I’ll call another day.”

The Spider turned him round about, and went into his den,  
For well he knew the silly Fly would soon come back again;  
So he wove a subtle web, in a little corner sly,  
And set his table ready, to dine upon the Fly.

Then he came out to his door again, and merrily did sing:  
“Come hither, hither, pretty Fly, with the pearl and silver wing;

Your robes are green and purple—there’s a crest upon your head;  
Your eyes are like the diamond bright, but mine are dull as lead.”

Alas, alas! how very soon this silly little Fly,  
Hearing his wily, flattering words, came slowly flitting by;  
With buzzing wings she hung aloft, then near and nearer drew,  
Thinking only of her brilliant eyes, and green and purple hue;

Thinking only of her crested head—poor foolish thing! At last,  
Up jumped the cunning Spider, and fiercely held her fast.  
He dragged her up his winding stair, into his dismal den,  
Within his little parlour—but she ne’er came out again!

*(449 words)*

## **Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night**

*Walt Whitman*

Vigil strange I kept on the field one night;  
When you my son and my comrade dropt at my side that day,  
One look I but gave which your dear eyes return'd with a look I shall never forget,  
One touch of your hand to mine O boy, reach'd up as you lay on the ground,  
Then onward I sped in the battle, the even-contested battle,  
Till late in the night reliev'd to the place at last again I made my way,  
Found you in death so cold dear comrade, found your body son of  
responding laughter, (never again on earth responding,)  
Bared your face in the starlight, curious the scene, cool blew the moderate night-  
wind,  
Long there and then in vigil I stood, dimly around me the battlefield spreading,  
Vigil wondrous and vigil sweet there in the fragrant silent night,  
But not a tear fell, not even a long-drawn sigh, long, long I gazed,  
Then on the earth partially reclining sat by your side leaning my chin in my hands,  
Passing sweet hours, immortal and mystic hours with you dearest comrade - not a  
tear, not a word,  
Vigil of silence, love and death, vigil for you my son and my soldier,  
As onward silently stars aloft, eastward new ones upward stole,  
Vigil final for you brave boy, (I could not save you, swift was your death,  
I faithfully loved you and cared for you living, I think we shall surely meet again,)  
Till at latest lingering of the night, indeed just as the dawn appear'd,  
My comrade I wrapt in his blanket, envelop'd well his form,  
Folded the blanket well, tucking it carefully over head and carefully under feet,  
And there and then and bathed by the rising sun, my son in his grave, in his rude-  
dug grave I deposited,  
Ending my vigil strange with that, vigil of night and battle-field dim,  
Vigil for boy of responding laughter, (never again on earth responding,)  
Vigil for comrade swiftly slain, vigil I never forget, how as day brighten'd,  
I rose from the chill ground and folded my soldier well in his blanket,  
And buried him where he fell.

*(358 words)*

