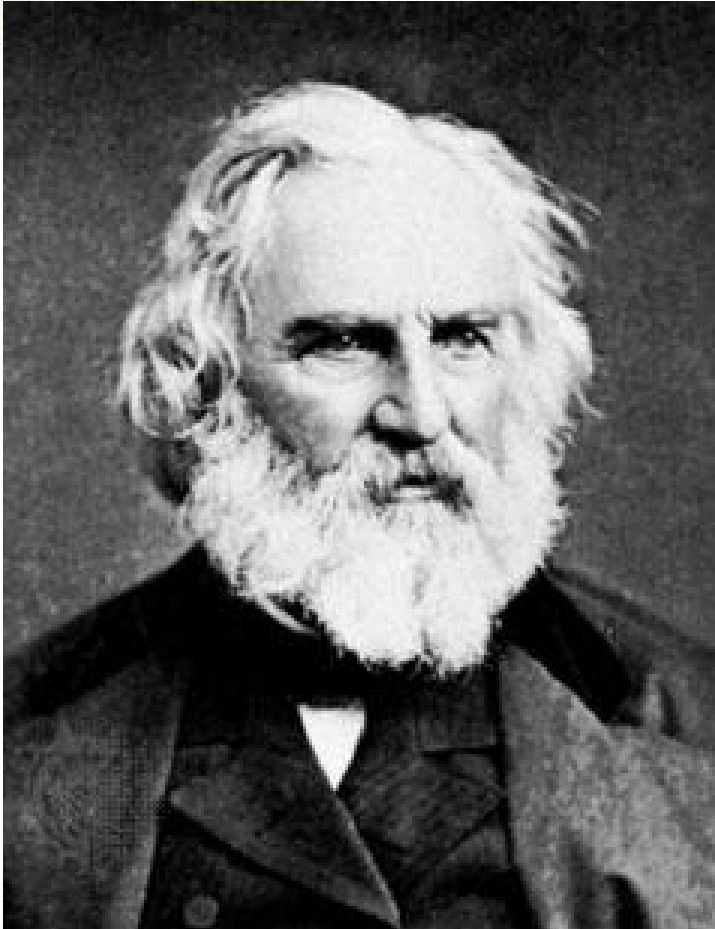


Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

(Feb. 27, 1807- March 24, 1882)



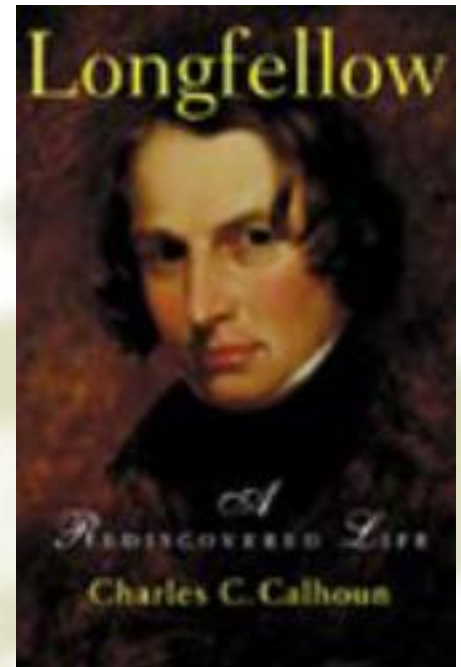
- ❖ The most distinguished poet the country had produced.
- ❖ As a friend once wrote to him, "no other poet was so fully recognized in his lifetime".

Teaching Focus

Longfellow's Life and Major Works

A Psalm of Life

Appreciating *A Psalm of Life*



Longfellow's Life and Major Works

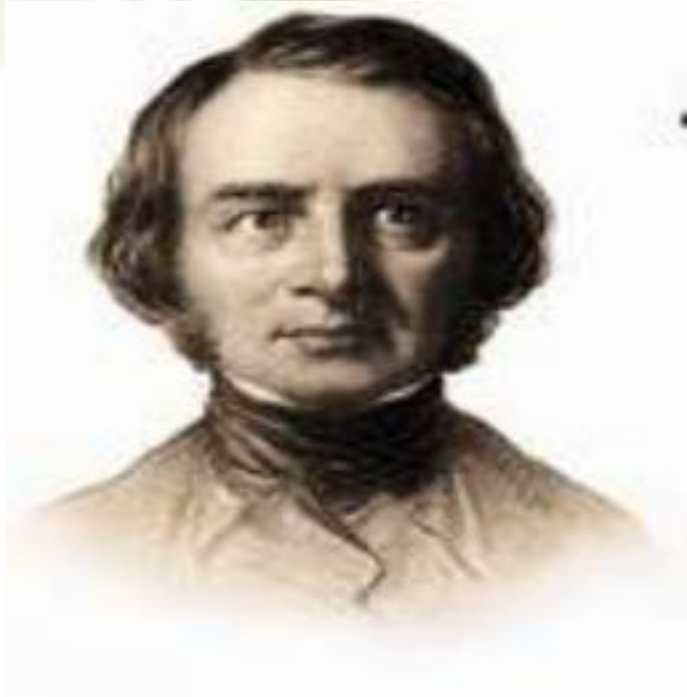
- ❖ born on Feb. 27, 1807 in Portland, Maine, Mass.,
- ❖ the second son in a family of eight children.



he loved reading and liked stories set in foreign places: *The Arabian Nights*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and the plays of Shakespeare.

After graduating from Bowdoin College, Longfellow studied modern languages in Europe for three years, then returned to Bowdoin to teach them.





In 1831 he married Mary Storer Potter and soon published his first book, a description of his travels called *Outre Mer* ("Overseas").

But in November 1835, during a second trip to Europe, Longfellow's life was shaken when his wife died during a miscarriage. He spent a grief-stricken year in Germany and Switzerland.

- ❖ In 1836, he took a position at Harvard. Three years later, he published his first collection of poems, *Voices of the Night*. Many of these poems ("A Psalm of Life," for example) showed people triumphing over adversity, and in a struggling young nation that theme was inspiring.
- ❖ Frances Appleton, a young woman from Boston, had refused his proposal of marriage first, but finally accepted his proposal the following spring, ushering in the happiest 18 years of Longfellow's life. The couple had six children, five of whom lived to adulthood, and the marriage gave him new confidence.

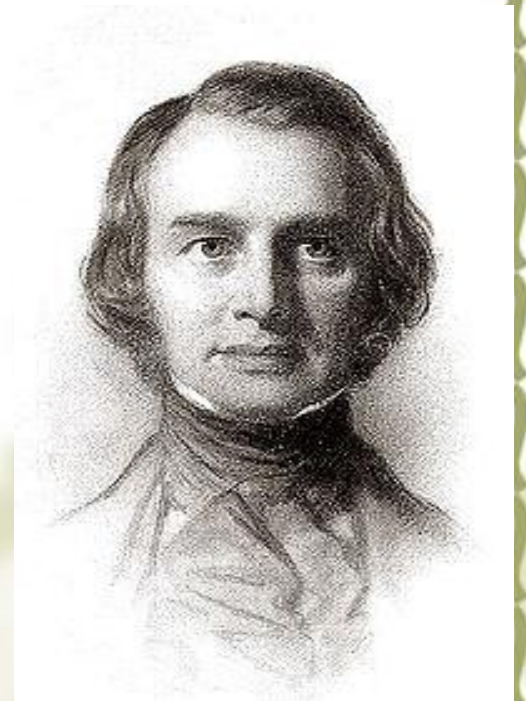


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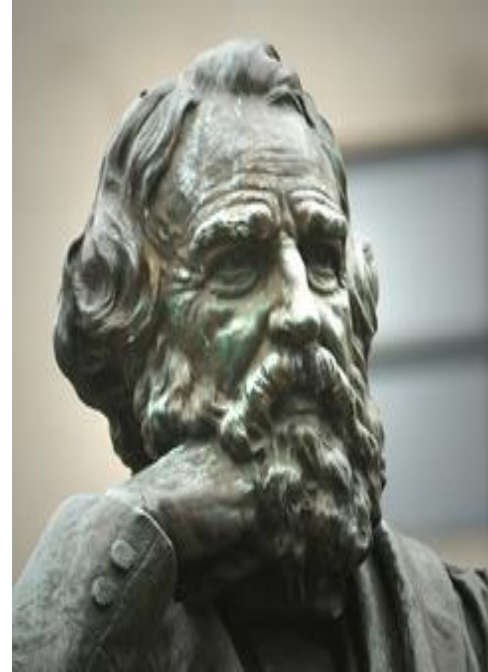


- ❖ In 1847, he published *Evangeline*, a book-length poem about what would now be called "ethnic cleansing." The poem takes place as the British drive the French from Nova Scotia, and two lovers are parted, only to find each other years later when the man is about to die.

- ❖ In 1854, Longfellow decided to quit teaching to devote all his time to poetry. He published *Hiawatha*, a long poem about Native American life.
- ❖ In 1861, Longfellow's wife died. Profoundly saddened, Longfellow published nothing for the next two years. He found comfort in his family and in reading Dante's *Divine Comedy*. (Later he produced its first American translation.) In 1863 he published *Tales of a Wayside Inn*.



- ❖ When the Civil War ended in 1865, his most important work was finished, but his fame kept growing. In London alone, 24 different companies were publishing his work. His poems were popular throughout the English-speaking world, and they were widely translated, making him the most famous American of his day. His admirers included Lincoln, Dickens, and Baudelaire.
- ❖ He died on March 24, 1882, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was the first American figure with a bust in the Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey located in London.



Major Works

❖ Poetry

Voices of the Night (1839)

Ballads and Other Poems (1841)

Evangeline (1847)

The Song of Hiawatha (1855)

❖ Prose

The New England Tragedies (1868)

❖ Drama

The Spanish Student (1843)

❖ Fiction

Hyperion: A Romance (1839)

Poetry in Translation

❖ *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* (1867)

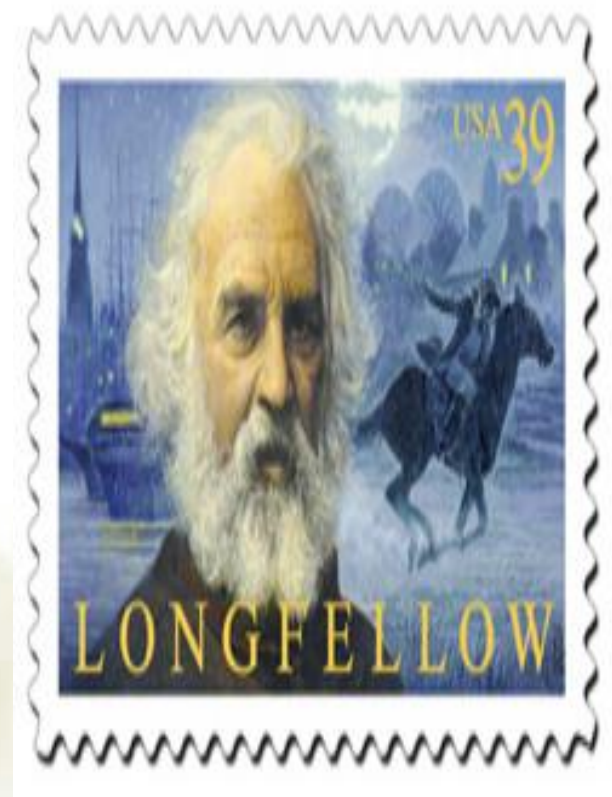


Longfellow's Writing Styles

- ❖ Much of his work is categorized as lyric poetry. Longfellow experimented with many forms, his published poetry shows great versatility, blank verse, heroic couplets, ballads and sonnets. (various poetic form)
- ❖ Longfellow often used didacticism in his poetry. Much of his poetry imparts cultural and moral values, particularly focused on promoting life as being more than material pursuits.
- ❖ Longfellow often used allegory in his work.

A Psalm of Life

- ❖ Mr. Longfellow said of this poem:
" I kept it some time in manuscript, unwilling to show it to any one, it being a voice from my inmost heart, at a time when I was rallying from depression. "
Before it was published in the *Knickerbocker Magazine*, October, 1838, it was read by the poet to his college class at the close of a lecture on Goethe.



- ❖ Its title, though used now exclusively for this poem, was originally, in the poet's mind, a generic one. He notes from time to time that he has written a psalm, a psalm of death, or another psalm of life. The 'psalmist' is thus the poet himself. Literally, the psalmist is of course King David.





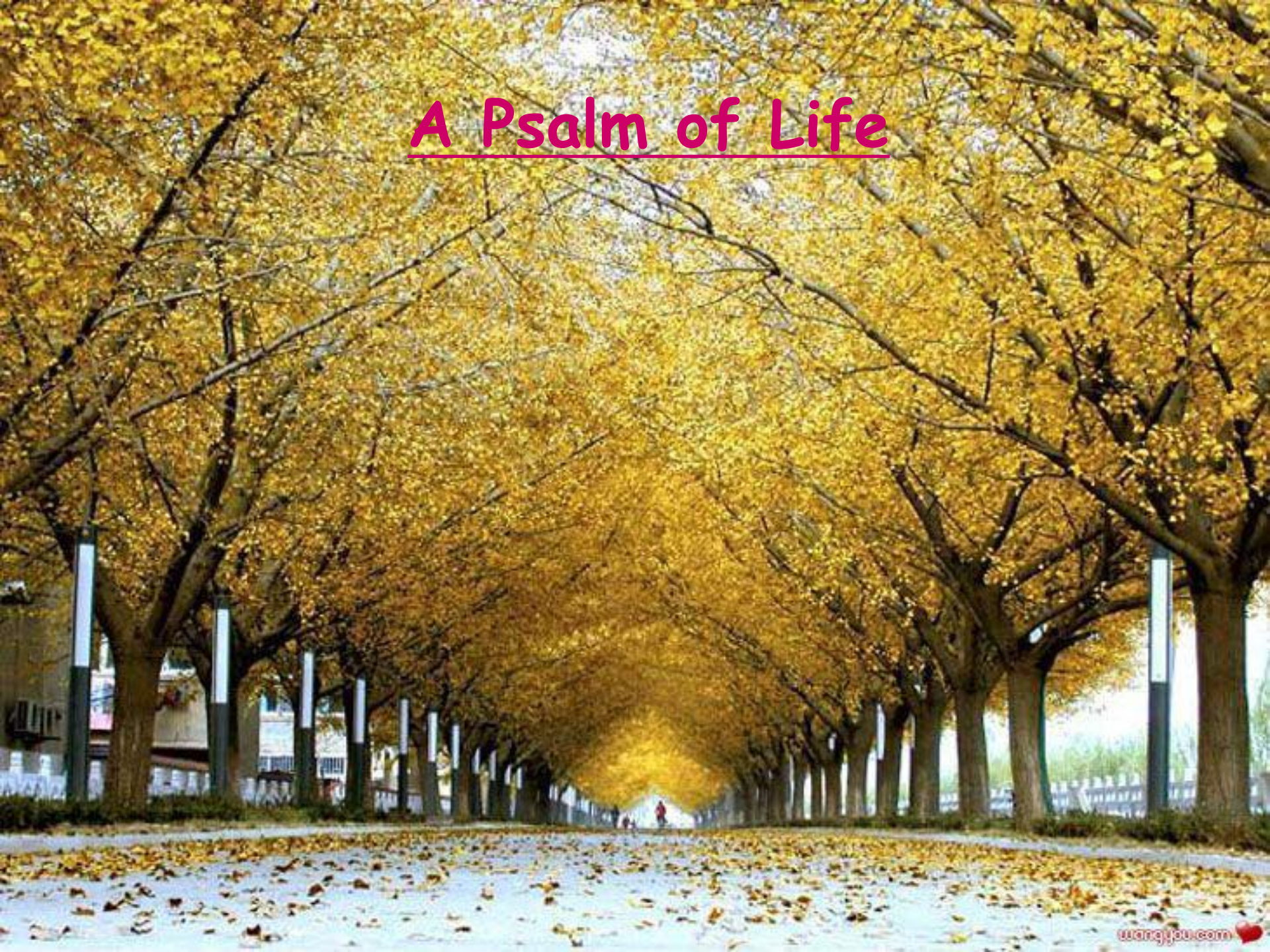
- ❖ This is a very inspiring poem. The concept of living only in the present is a very difficult thing for people, as the regrets of the past and hopes of the future can be very troublesome and misleading at times. This psalm brings out feelings of confidence—strength and belief in oneself.
- ❖ The message is very clear. Just live. It says that the purpose of life is not to have fun or indeed to suffer but to *do* something.

Topics for Presentation

- ❖ 1. The beauty in *A Psalm of Life* (rhyme, meter, rhetoric devices, etc.,)
- ❖ 2. What kind of person is the speaker of this poem? What is the tone and the theme?



A Psalm of Life



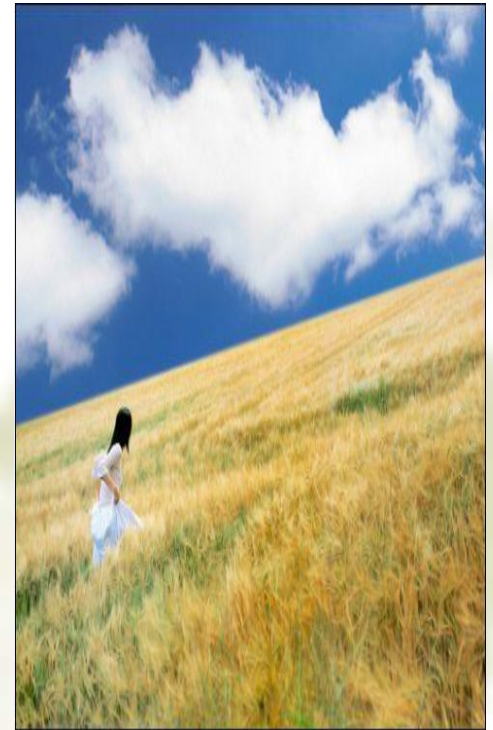
A Psalm of Life

What the Heart of the Young Man Said to the Psalmist

Psalm: sacred song or hymn, esp one of those in the book of Psalm in the Old Testament. 赞美诗, 圣歌

|

- ❖ 1 Tell me not in mournful numbers,
- ❖ 2 Life is but an empty dream!
- ❖ 3 For the soul is dead that slumbers,
- ❖ 4 And things are not what they seem.
- ❖ sleep peacefully and comfortably



Summary of Stanza 1

- ❖ In the opening stanza, the speaker directly addresses the psalmist. He begins by dismissing the psalmist's sad poetry, and he rejects as dangerous the psalmist's notion that human life is a meaningless illusion.



II

- ❖ 5 Life is real—Life is earnest—
- ❖ 6 And the grave is not its goal:
- ❖ 7 Dust thou art , to dust returnest,
- ❖ 8 Was not spoken of the soul.
- ❖ **For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou be turned again.(Old Testament: Genesis 3:19)*



Summary of Stanza 2

- ❖ Because the soul lives eternally, the speaker reasons, life must be real.
- ❖ These lines are an allusion to the Bible's book of *Genesis*, where God says to the fallen Adam, "*dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*" In Longfellow's poem, the speaker is asserting that although the mortal body will die, the soul is exempt from death.



III

- ❖ 9 Not enjoyment , and not sorrow,
- ❖ 10 Is **our** destin'd end or way;
- ❖ 11 But to *act*, that much to-morrow.
- ❖ 12 Find **us** farther than to-day.
- ❖



Summary of Stanza 3

- ❖ The third stanza introduces the central theme of the poem: the purpose of life is not to experience pleasure or sorrow, but "to act" — to perform the deeds that will improve the condition of mankind.
- ❖ Here, the speaker has ceased to address the psalmist; instead, he is directing his remarks to mankind in general.



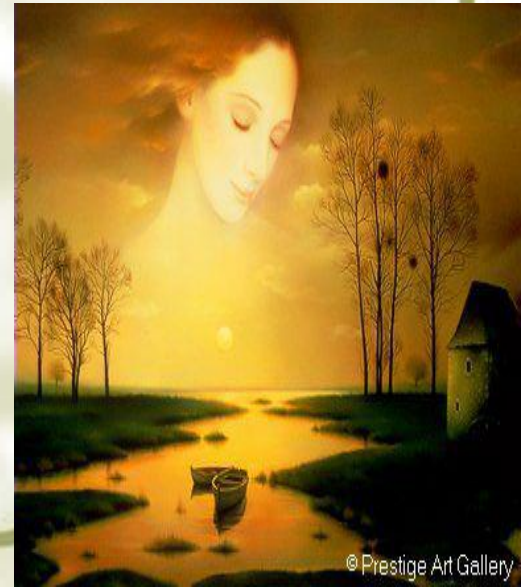
Part I (I,II,III)

- ❖ Life is not an empty dream
- ❖ Life is real, life is earnest
- ❖ Neither enjoyment nor sorrow is our destined end or way.
- ❖ But to **act**



IV

- ❖ 13 Art is long , and time is fleeting.
- ❖ 14 And our hearts , though stout and brave,
- ❖ 15 Still , like muffled drums , are beating
- ❖ 16 Funeral marches to the grave.
- ❖ * A paraphrase of Seneca's complaint, "*Vita brevis est, ars longa.*" meaning "The life is so short, the craft so long to learn."
- ❖ Muffled: make the sound quieter by covering it in cloth



Summary of Stanza 4

- ❖ The fourth stanza begins with an allusion to a line from Seneca's work which states "Life is brief, art long."
- ❖ On a literal level, of course, a heartbeat can sound like a drumbeat, but Longfellow extends this idea to suggest that our own hearts are measuring out the backbeat of a steady and irreversible journey toward death. Each beat of our hearts, Longfellow implies, carries us closer to death.
- ❖ If you read the stanza aloud, you will notice that, at this point, the trochaic rhythm is especially steady and even; it sounds as though a drum is beating in the background.



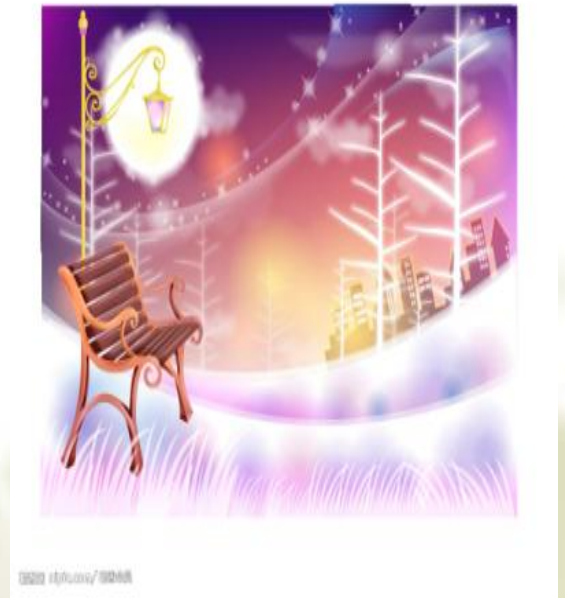
V

- ❖ 17 In the world's broad field of battle,
- ❖ 18 In the bivouac of Life,
- ❖ 19 Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
- ❖ 20 Be a hero in the strife!
- ❖ Bivouac: camp without tents or any other cover
- ❖



Summary of Stanza 5

- ❖ By comparing life to a "bivouac," a temporary campsite during a battle, the speaker reminds us again of the transience of human existence. He exhorts the reader — who, by implication, is a soldier — to become a hero in this battle and not merely march to his or her death like a cow forced to the slaughterhouse.



VI

- ❖ 21 Trust no Future. howe'er pleasant!
- ❖ 22 Let the dead Past bury its dead!
- ❖ 23 **Act—act** in the living Present!
- ❖ 24 Heart within, and God o'er head!



Summary of Stanza 6

- ❖ In the sixth stanza, the speaker explains in detail how the reader can become a hero. He advises the reader not to hope for the future nor to worry about the past. Instead, in a return to the poem's central theme, he urges the reader to live actively in the present. The speaker emphasizes his imperative instruction that we "act" by repeating the word twice in line 23.
- ❖ Longfellow draws our attention to the word "act" by manipulating the meter: not only does he insert a caesura between the two "acts," but, metrically, the two consecutive words are stressed, giving them added force.



Part 2 (IV,V,VI)

- ❖ Art is long, time is short.
- ❖ Life is compared to be a battle. In the battle, one should act like a hero rather than like a driven cattle.
- ❖ Past, present and future



VII

- ❖ 25 Lives of great men all remind us
- ❖ 26 We can make *our* lives sublime,
- ❖ 27 And, departing, leave behind us
- ❖ 28 Footprints on the sands of time.



Summary of Stanza 7

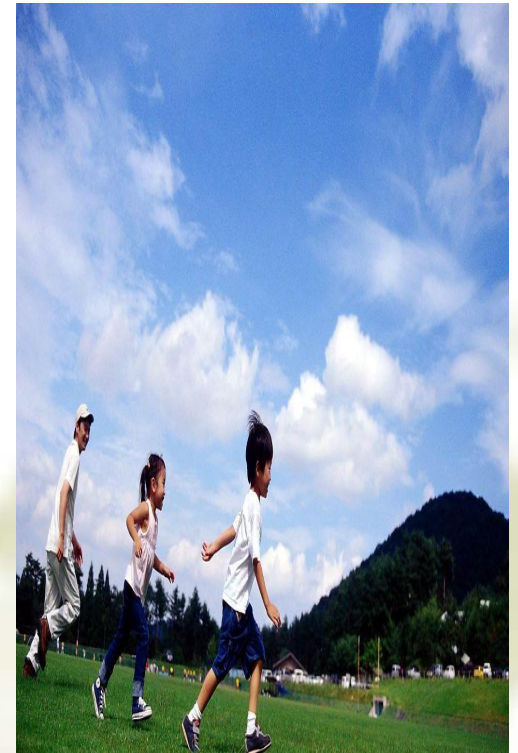
These "great men," the speaker indicates, should inspire us to live our lives so fully that we, too, will leave behind records of greatness when we die.

Longfellow suggests the idea of a record of greatness by using a metaphor: "footprints on the sands of time." Even here, however, this metaphor ironically reminds us of the transient nature of life, since these footprints will eventually be washed away by the tide. Nonetheless, they may have a positive effect on the people who live after us.



VIII

- ❖ 29 Footprints, that, perhaps another,
- ❖ 30 Sailing o'er life solemn main,
- ❖ 31 A forlorn and shipwreck'd brother,
- ❖ 32 Seeing, shall take heart again.
- ❖ Forlorn: **lonely**



Summary of Stanza 8

- ❖ The speaker envisions a shipwrecked sailor who is lost at sea but observes these footprints in the sand.
- ❖ In this conceit, the sailor represents any discouraged or lonely individual who receives encouragement from the memory of the good deeds of others.



Part 3 (VII,VIII)

- ❖ Great men set good examples for us, so when we departed this world, we should leave marks upon next generation, from which they will gain courage.



IX

- ❖ 33 Let us, then, be up and doing,
- ❖ 34 With a heart for any fate;
- ❖ 35 Still achieving, still pursuing,
- ❖ 36 Learn to labor and to wait.



Summary of Stanza 9

Part 4(IX)

- ❖ The speaker concludes the poem by exhorting us to live active, courageous lives. He is urging the reader to strive continuously to accomplish good, useful deeds: these good deeds, it is suggested, give life meaning and purpose.

- ❖ Let us then be up and doing.
- ❖ Learn to labor and to wait.





Appreciating *A Psalm of Life*

- ❖ The poem is written in trochaic tetrameter (四音步扬抑格), rhymed *abab*.
- ❖ The speaker:
 - ❖ optimistic, passionate and a man of action.
- ❖ Rhetoric devices: alliteration, metaphor, simile, allusion, parallelism, repetition, etc.,
- ❖ Tone:
 - ❖ uplifting, optimistic, encouraging
- ❖ Theme:
 - ❖ Only action can make sense. Don't indulge yourself in the past or pin much hope for the future. Seize the day. Do it right now.

Topics for Discussion

(小组讨论)

What is the meaning of life and how should we spend our lives? (人生的意义在于什么? 我们应该如何度过一生?)

Man's dearest possession is life. It is given to him but once, and he must live it so as to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years, never know the burning shame of a mean and petty past; so live that, dying, he might say: all my life, all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world—the fight for the Liberation of Mankind.

—Ostrovsky

Perfect Moment
Ray & Jing
26 May 2007

人最宝贵的东西是生命, 生命属于人只有一次. 一个人的一生应该是这样度过的: 当他回首往事的时候, 他不会因为虚度年华而悔恨, 也不会因为碌碌无为而羞耻。——奥斯特洛夫斯基 《钢铁是怎样炼成的》

活着, 就是做有意义的事。

Words To Live By / 生活的忠告

- ❖ Eat more roughage; 多吃些粗粮;
- ❖ Do more than others expect you to do and do it pains; 给别人比他们期望的更多，并用心去做;
- ❖ Remember what life tells you; 熟记生活告诉你的一切;
- ❖ Don't take to heart every thing you hear. Don't spend all that you have. Don't sleep as long as you want; 不要轻信你听到的每件事，不要花光你的所有，不要想睡多久就睡多久;
- ❖ Whenever you say "I love you", please say it honestly; 无论何时说“我爱你”，请真心实意;
- ❖ Whenever you say "I'm sorry", please look into the other person's eyes; 无论何时说“对不起”，请看对方的眼睛;
- ❖ Fall in love at first sight; 相信一见钟情;
- ❖ Don't neglect dreams; 请不要忽视梦想;
- ❖ Love deeply and ardently, even if there is pain, but this is the way to make your life complete; 深情热烈地爱，也许会受伤，但这是使人生完整的唯一方法。



However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names.—Henry David Thoreau

不论你的生活如何卑贱，你要面对它生活，不要躲避它，更别用恶言咒骂它。

Life is a chain of moments of enjoyment; not only about survival;

生活是一串串的快乐时光；我们不仅仅是为了生存而生存。

Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible sun within us.

—Sir Thomas Brown

“生命是束纯净的火焰，我们依靠自己内心看不见的太阳而存在。”

—托马斯·布朗爵士

Homework

- ❖ Preview Walt Whitman's *O Captain, My Captain!*



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