

**Big Question: What gives life purpose? Is it creativity, self-expression, following one's dream, serving humanity, or something else? Explain.**

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Please read the following poem –as you have been taught to do, MULTIPLE TIMES – and answer the questions that follow. Also, on the lines provided, explain the meaning of each stanza.

## A Psalm of Life

BY HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

*What The Heart Of The Young Man Said To The Psalmist.*

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,  
Life is but an empty dream!  
For the soul is dead that slumbers,  
And things are not what they seem.

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Life is real! Life is earnest!  
And the grave is not its goal;  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
Was not spoken of the soul.

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Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,  
Is our destined end or way;  
But to act, that each to-morrow  
Find us farther than to-day.

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Art is long, and Time is fleeting,  
And our hearts, though stout and brave,  
Still, like muffled drums, are beating  
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,  
In the bivouac of Life,  
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!  
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!  
Let the dead Past bury its dead!  
Act,— act in the living Present!  
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,  
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,  
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,  
Seeing, shall take heart again.

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

Please answer the following questions in complete sentences.

### Technical

1. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem?

2. Please identify an example of personification in the poem.

3. Please identify one simile from the poem.

4. Identify a metaphor.

### Analysis

1. What is Longfellow urging the reader to do through this poem? Explain how you know this by citing specific examples.

2. In its opening stanza the poem rejects the “mournful” rhythms of language that bear a sad or melancholy message. The lines of this poem are short and are frequently interrupted (“Life is real—life is earnest—“). How does this active, energetic rhythm relate to the meaning of the poem?

3. The poem speaks both of the immortality of the soul (lines 7-8) and the lasting effect of individual achievements (lines 25-28). “Footprints in the sands of time” has long been the most famous line in the poem. What two different implications does this line have?