

Study Guide - English Poetry Recitation

Guidelines:

Participants will be divided into three academic age categories: Grade 6-8, Grade 9-11 (O-level and Matriculation), and the Open category (A-level, F.Sc, and above) for fair judgment.

Poetry will be divided into 2 categories: Serious and Humorous.

Description:

- Each delegate will receive a list of poems in English before the competition.
- Participants should choose one poem from their respective list and recite it within 2-3 minutes.
- The competition will consist of **one round** only.
- Delegates will be judged fairly, and awards will be given according to each age category.
- Separate winners will be selected for humorous and serious poetry categories.
- The same rubric will be used for judging both serious and humours categories.

CLARITY & PRONOUNICATION: The student's projection, pace, intonation, rhythm, and pronunciation. Projection should not be excessive. Any changes in tone should be appropriate to the subject matter.

INTONATION & STYLE: Use of emphasis, tone, and style of delivery should depict the student's understanding of the poem.

PHYSICAL PRESENCE: Stage presence, body language, composure and confidence.

INTERPRETATION: The student's interpretative and performance choices to enhance the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the poem without overshadowing the poem's language.

Source: <http://poetryoutloud.org/>

SCIL Olympiad

Category: Poetry (serious)

Age Category: Grade 6-8

1. How to Cut a Pomegranate

By Imtiaz Dharker

Never,' said my father,
'Never cut a pomegranate
through the heart. It will weep blood.
Treat it delicately, with respect.

Just slit the upper skin across four quarters.

This is a magic fruit,
so when you split it open, be prepared
for the jewels of the world to tumble out,
more precious than garnets,
more lustrous than rubies,
lit as if from inside.

Each jewel contains a living seed.

Separate one crystal.
Hold it up to catch the light.

Inside is a whole universe.

No common jewel can give you this.'

Afterwards, I tried to make necklaces
of pomegranate seeds.

The juice spurted out, bright crimson,

and stained my fingers, then my mouth.

I didn't mind. The juice tasted of gardens
I had never seen, voluptuous
with myrtle, lemon, jasmine,
and alive with parrots' wings.

The pomegranate reminded me
that somewhere I had another home.

2. If

By Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,

Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

3. The Proof of Worth

By Edgar Albert Guest

Though victory's proof of the skill you possess,
Defeat is the proof of your grit;
A weakling can smile in his days of success,

But at trouble's first sign he will quit.
So the test of the heart and the test of your pluck
Isn't skies that are sunny and fair,
But how do you stand to the blow that is struck
And how do you battle despair?

A fool can seem wise when the pathway is clear
And it's easy to see the way out,
But the test of man's judgment is something to fear,
And what does he do when in doubt?
And the proof of his faith is the courage he shows
When sorrows lie deep in his breast;
It's the way that he suffers the griefs that he knows
That brings out his worst or his best.

The test of a man is how much he will bear
For a cause which he knows to be right,
How long will he stand in the depths of despair,
How much will he suffer and fight?
There are many to serve when the victory's near
And few are the hurts to be borne,
But it calls for a leader of courage to cheer
The men in a battle forlorn.

It's the way you hold out against odds that are great
That proves what your courage is worth,
It's the way that you stand to the bruises of fate

That shows up your stature and girth.
And victory's nothing but proof of your skill,
Veneered with a glory that's thin,
Unless it is proof of unfaltering will,
And unless you have suffered to win.

4. The Secret Place by Dennis Lee

There's a place I go, inside myself,
Where nobody else can be,
And none of my friends can tell it's there –
Nobody knows but me.

It's hard to explain the way it feels,
Or even where I go.
It isn't a place in time or space,
But once I'm there, I know.

It's tiny, it's shiny, it can't be seen,
But it's big as the sky at night ...
I try to explain and it hurts my brain,
But once I'm there, it's right.

There's a place I know inside myself,
And it's neither big nor small,
And whenever I go, it feels as though
I never left at all.

SCIL Olympiad

Category: Humorous Poetry

Age Category: Grade 6-8

1. Sick by Shel Silverstein

“I cannot go to school today,”
Said little Peggy Ann McKay.
“I have the measles and the mumps,
A gash, a rash and purple bumps.
My mouth is wet, my throat is dry,
I’m going blind in my right eye.
My tonsils are as big as rocks,
I’ve counted sixteen chicken pox
And there’s one more—that’s seventeen,
And don’t you think my face looks green?
My leg is cut—my eyes are blue—
It might be instamatic flu.
I cough and sneeze and gasp and choke,
I’m sure that my left leg is broke—
My hip hurts when I move my chin,
My belly button’s caving in,
My back is wrenched, my ankle’s sprained,
My ‘pendix pains each time it rains.
My nose is cold, my toes are numb.
I have a sliver in my thumb.
My neck is stiff, my voice is weak,
I hardly whisper when I speak.

My tongue is filling up my mouth,
I think my hair is falling out.
My elbow's bent, my spine ain't straight,
My temperature is one-o-eight.
My brain is shrunk, I cannot hear,
There is a hole inside my ear.
I have a hangnail, and my heart is—what?
What's that? What's that you say?
You say today is. . . Saturday?
G'bye, I'm going out to play!"

1. Macavity: The Mystery Cat. By: T.S. Eliot

Macavity's a mystery cat: he's called the Hidden Paw
For he's the master criminal who can defy the law.
He's the bafflement of the Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair
For when they reach the scene of the crime-Macavity's not there!

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
There never was a cat of such deceitfulness and suavity.
He's a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity,
You may meet him in a by-street, you may see him in the square.
But when you try to grab him—Macavity's not there!

And his footprints are not found in any file of Scotland Yard's.
And when you think he's half asleep, he's always wide awake.
And when you think he's asleep, he's actually prowling.

Macavity's the master of crime, and he's always on the prowl.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
For he's a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.
You may meet him in a by-street, you may see him in the square.
But when you try to grab him—Macavity's not there!

He's outwardly respectable. (They say he cheats at cards.)
And his footprints are not found in any file of Scotland Yard's.
And when you think he's half asleep, he's always wide awake.
And when you think he's asleep, he's actually prowling.

And his eyes go piercing through the dark of the midnight screens.
And his footprints are not found in any file of Scotland Yard's.
You may seek him in the basement, you may seek him in the air.
But Macavity's not there!

There was an old lady
who swallowed a horse.
She died of course.

2. Confessions Of A Serial Plant Killer by Cynthia C. Naspinski

Oh, I wish that I had a green thumb.
All my houseplants are looking quite glum.
I never can tell
Why they're looking unwell

Or why so many succumb.

Have I failed to give enough water?

Have I watered them more than I oughta?

Are they getting too hot?

Is this not the right spot?

It's like sending poor lambs to the slaughter.

The hard, undeniable fact is

Many succulents, ferns and a cactus,

A begonia, a fig,

Many palms, small and big,

Have been victims of my malpractice.

I confess I'm a serial killer.

Many end up as mulch or land filler.

I kill far more plants

Than snails, thrips or ants.

Or an army of green caterpillar!

Though houseplants are deemed beneficial,

Should these perish, then it is official:

I'll waste no more dough

Just to watch 'em die slow,

For my next plants will be artificial!

3. The ABC by Spike Milligan

'Twas midnight in the schoolroom
And every desk was shut
When suddenly from the alphabet
Was heard a loud "Tut-Tut!"

Said A to B, "I don't like C;
His manners are a lack.
For all I ever see of C
Is a semi-circular back!"

"I disagree," said D to B,
"I've never found C so.
From where I stand he seems to be
An uncompleted O."

C was vexed, "I'm much perplexed,
You criticize my shape.
I'm made like that, to help spell Cat
And Cow and Cool and Cape."

"He's right" said E; said F, "Whoopee!"
Said G, "'Ip, 'Ip, 'ooray!"
"You're dropping me," roared H to G.
"Don't do it please I pray."
"Out of my way," LL said to K.
"I'll make poor I look ILL."

To stop this stunt J stood in front,
And presto! ILL was JILL.

"U know," said V, "that W
Is twice the age of me.
For as a Roman V is five
I'm half as young as he."

X and Y yawned sleepily,
"Look at the time!" they said.
"Let's all get off to beddy byes."
They did, then "Z-z-z."

SCIL Olympiad

Category: Poetry (serious)

Age Category: Grade 9-11

1. Passport by Mahmoud Darwish

They did not recognize me in the shadows
That suck away my colour in this Passport
And to them my wound was an exhibit
For a tourist who loves to collect photographs
They did not recognize me,
Ah... Don't leave
The palm of my hand without the sun
Because the trees recognize me
All the songs of the rain recognize me
Don't leave me pale like the moon!

All the birds that followed my palm
To the door of the distant airport
All the wheat fields
All the prisons
All the white tombstones
All the barbed boundaries
All the waving handkerchiefs
All the eyes
were with me,
But they dropped them from my passport

Stripped of my name and identity?
On a soil I nourished with my own hands?
Today Jacob cried out
Filling the sky:
Don't make an example of me again!
Oh, gentlemen, Prophets,
Don't ask the trees for their names
Don't ask the valleys who their mother is
From my forehead bursts the sword of light
And from my hand springs the water of the river
All the hearts of the people are my identity
So take away my passport!

2. Envy by Mary Lamb

This rose-tree is not made to bear
The violet blue, nor lily fair,
Nor the sweet mignonette:
And if this tree were discontent,
Or wished to change its natural bent,
It all in vain would fret.

And should it fret, you would suppose
It ne'er had seen its own red rose,
Nor after gentle shower
Had ever smelled its rose's scent,
Or it could ne'er be discontent
With its own pretty flower.

Like such a blind and senseless tree
As I've imagined this to be,
All envious persons are:
With care and culture all may find
Some pretty flower in their own mind,
Some talent that is rare.

3. Walk Away by Cecil Day-Lewis

It is eighteen years ago, almost to the day –
A sunny day with leaves just turning,
The touch-lines new-ruled – since I watched you play
Your first game of football, then, like a satellite
Wrenched from its orbit, go drifting away

Behind a scatter of boys. I can see
You walking away from me towards the school
With the pathos of a half-fledged thing set free
Into a wilderness, the gait of one
Who finds no path where the path should be.

That hesitant figure, eddying away
Like a winged seed loosened from its parent stem,
Has something I never quite grasp to convey
About nature's give-and-take – the small, the scorching
Ordeals which fire one's irresolute clay.

I have had worse partings, but none that so
Gnaws at my mind still. Perhaps it is roughly
Saying what God alone could perfectly show –
How selfhood begins with a walking away,
And love is proved in the letting go.

4. Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night by Dylan Thomas

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieve it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.

Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

SCIL Faith Olympiad

Category: Humorous Poetry

Age Category: Grade 9 to 11

1. The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves

by Gwendolyn Brooks

There once was a tiger, terrible and tough,
who said “I don’t think tigers are stylish enough.
They put on only orange and stripes of fierce black.
Fine and fancy fashion is what they mostly lack.

Even though they proudly
speak most loudly,
so that the jungle shakes
and every eye awakes—

Even though they slither
hither and thither
in such a wild way
that few may care to stay—
to be tough just isn’t enough.”

These things the tiger said,
And growled and tossed his head,
and rushed to the jungle fair
for something fine to wear.

Then!—what a hoot and yell
upon the jungle fell
The rhinoceros rasped!
The elephant gasped!
“By all that’s sainted!”
said wolf—and fainted.

The crocodile cried.
The lion sighed.
The leopard sneered.
The jaguar jeered.
The antelope shouted.
The panther pouted.
Everyone screamed
“We never dreamed
that ever could be
in history
a tiger who loves
to wear white gloves.
White gloves are for girls
with manners and curls
and dresses and hats and bow-ribbons.

That's the way it always was
and rightly so, because
it's nature's nice decree
that tiger folk should be
not dainty, but daring,
and wisely wearing
what's fierce as the face,
not whiteness and lace!"

They shamed him and shamed him—
till none could have blamed him,
when at last, with a sigh
and a saddened eye,
and in spite of his love,
he took off each glove,
and agreed this was meant
all to prevail:
each tiger content
with his lashing tail
and satisfied
with his strong striped hide

2. Afternoon in School - The Last Lesson

by D. H. Lawrence

When will the bell ring, and end this weariness?
How long have they tugged the leash, and strained apart

My pack of unruly hounds: I cannot start
Them again on a quarry of knowledge they hate to hunt,
I can haul them and urge them no more.

No more can I endure to bear the brunt
Of the books that lie out on the desks: a full three score
Of several insults of blotted pages and scrawl
Of slovenly work that they have offered me.

I am sick, and tired more than any thrall
Upon the woodstacks working weariedly.

And shall I take
The last dear fuel and heap it on my soul
Till I rouse my will like a fire to consume
Their dross of indifference, and burn the scroll
Of their insults in punishment? - I will not!

I will not waste myself to embers for them,
Not all for them shall the fires of my life be hot,
For myself a heap of ashes of weariness, till sleep
Shall have raked the embers clear: I will keep
Some of my strength for myself, for if I should sell
It all for them, I should hate them -
- I will sit and wait for the bell.

3. The Owl-Critic by James Thomas Fields

"Who stuffed that white owl?"
No one spoke in the shop,
The barber was busy, and he couldn't stop;

The customers, waiting their turns, were all reading
The "Daily," the "Herald," the "Post," little heeding
The young man who blurted out such a blunt question;
Not one raised a head, or even made a suggestion;
And the barber kept on shaving.

"Don't you see, Mr. Brown,"
Cried the youth, with a frown,
"How wrong the whole thing is,
How preposterous each wing is,
How flattened the head is, how jammed down the neck is --
In short, the whole owl, what an ignorant wreck 't is!
I make no apology;
I've learned owl-eology.

I've passed days and nights in a hundred collections,
And cannot be blinded to any deflections
Arising from unskilful fingers that fail
To stuff a bird right, from his beak to his tail.

Mister Brown! Mr. Brown!
Do take that bird down,
Or you'll soon be the laughingstock all over town!"
And the barber kept on shaving.

"I've studied owls,
And other night-fowls,
And I tell you

What I know to be true;
An owl cannot roost
With his limbs so unloosed;
No owl in this world
Ever had his claws curled,
Ever had his legs slanted,
Ever had his bill canted,
Ever had his neck screwed
Into that attitude.
He cant do it, because
'Tis against all bird-laws.

Anatomy teaches,
Ornithology preaches,
An owl has a toe
That can't turn out so!
I've made the white owl my study for years,
And to see such a job almost moves me to tears!
Mr. Brown, I'm amazed
You should be so gone crazed
As to put up a bird
In that posture absurd!
To look at that owl really brings on a dizziness;
The man who stuffed him don't half know his business!"
And the barber kept shaving.

"Examine those eyes

I'm filled with surprise
Taxidermists should pass
Off on you such poor glass;
So unnatural they seem
They'd make Audubon scream,
And John Burroughs laugh
To encounter such chaff.
Do take that bird down;
Have him stuffed again, Brown!"
And the barber kept on shaving!

"With some sawdust and bark
I could stuff in the dark
An owl better than that.
I could make an old hat
Look more like an owl
Than that horrid fowl,
Stuck up there so stiff like a side of coarse leather.
In fact, about him there's not one natural feather."

Just then, with a wink and a sly normal lurch,
The owl, very gravely, got down from his perch,
Walked around, and regarded his fault-finding critic
(Who thought he was stuffed) with a glance analytic,
And then fairly hooted, as if he should say:
"Your learning's at fault this time, anyway:
Don't waste it again on a live bird, I pray.

I'm an owl; you're another. Sir Critic, good day!"
And the barber kept on shaving.

4. The English lesson by Richard Krogh

We'll begin with a box, and the plural is boxes,
But the plural of ox should be oxen, not oxes.
Then one fowl is goose, but two are called geese,
Yet the plural of moose should never be meese.

You may find a lone mouse or a whole lot of mice,
But the plural of house is houses, not hice.
If the plural of man is always men,
Why shouldn't the plural of pan be pen?

If I speak of a foot, and you show me your feet,
And I give you a boot — would a pair be called beet?
If one is a tooth and a whole set are teeth,
Why shouldn't the plural of booth be beeth?

Then one may be that, and three may be those,
Yet hat in the plural would never be hose,
And the plural of cat is cats, not cose.

We speak of a brother and also of brethren,
But though we say mother, we never say methren.
Then the masculine pronouns are he, his, and him,

But imagine the feminine — she, shis, and shim!

So our English, I think you will all agree,
Is the craziest language you ever did see.
I take it you already knew
Of tough and bough and cough and dough?
Others may stumble, but not you,
On hiccough, thorough, laugh, and through?

Well done! And now you wish, perhaps,
To learn of less familiar traps?
Beware of heard, a dreadful word,
That looks like beard and sounds like bird.
And dead — it's said like bed, not bead —
For goodness sake, don't call it “deed”!

Watch out for meat and great and threat —
They rhyme with suite and straight and debt.
A moth is not a moth in mother,
Nor both in bother, broth in brother.

And here is not a match for there,
And dear and fear for bear and pear.
And then there's dose and rose and lose —
Just look them up — and goose and choose.

And cork and work and card and ward,

And font and front and word and sword,
And do and go and thwart and cart —
Come, come, I've hardly made a start!

A dreadful language? Man alive,
I'd mastered it when I was five!

SCIL Faith Olympiad

Category: Serious Poetry

Age Category: Open Category

1. The Immigrant's Song by Tishani Doshi

Let us not speak of those days
when coffee beans filled the morning
with hope, when our mothers' headscarves
hung like white flags on washing lines.
Let us not speak of the long arms of sky
that used to cradle us at dusk.
And the baobabs—let us not trace
the shape of their leaves in our dreams,
or yearn for the noise of those nameless birds
that sang and died in the church's eaves.
Let us not speak of men,
stolen from their beds at night.
Let us not say the word
disappeared.
Let us not remember the first smell of rain.
Instead, let us speak of our lives now—
the gates and bridges and stores.
And when we break bread
in cafés and at kitchen tables
with our new brothers,
let us not burden them with stories

of war or abandonment.

Let us not name our old friends
who are unravelling like fairytales
in the forests of the dead.

Naming them will not bring them back.

Let us stay here, and wait for the future
to arrive, for grandchildren to speak
in forked tongues about the country
we once came from.

Tell us about it, they might ask.

And you might consider telling them
of the sky and the coffee beans,
the small white houses and dusty streets.

You might set your memory afloat
like a paper boat down a river.

You might pray that the paper
whispers your story to the water,
that the water sings it to the trees,
that the trees howl and howl
it to the leaves. If you keep still
and do not speak, you might hear
your whole life fill the world
until the wind is the only word.

2. Kindness by Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,

feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.

How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.

You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.

You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,

only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

3. The Things that Matter by Edith Nesbit

Now that I've nearly done my days,
And grown too stiff to sweep or sew,
I sit and think, till I'm amaze,
About what lots of things I know:
Things as I've found out one by one--
And when I'm fast down in the clay,
My knowing things and how they're done
Will all be lost and thrown away.

There's things, I know, as won't be lost,
Things as folks write and talk about:
The way to keep your roots from frost,
And how to get your ink spots out.
What medicine's good for sores and sprains,
What way to salt your butter down,
What charms will cure your different pains,
And what will bright your faded gown.

But more important things than these,
They can't be written in a book:
How fast to boil your greens and peas,
And how good bacon ought to look;
The feel of real good wearing stuff,
The kind of apple as will keep,
The look of bread that's rose enough,
And how to get a child asleep.

Whether the jam is fit to pot,
Whether the milk is going to turn,
Whether a hen will lay or not,
Is things as some folks never learn.
I know the weather by the sky,
I know what herbs grow in what lane;
And if sick men are going to die,
Or if they'll get about again.

I used to know where birds would set,
And likely spots for trout or hare,
The way to set a line or snare;
But not the way to truss a chick,
To fry a fish, or baste a roast,
Nor how to tell, when folks are sick,
What kind of herb will ease them most!

Forgetting seems such silly waste!

I know so many little things,
O God, you made me like to know,
You kept the things straight in my head.

4. What Were They Like? By Denise Levertov

Did the people of Viet Nam
use lanterns of stone?
Did they hold ceremonies
to reverence the opening of buds?
Were they inclined to quiet laughter?
Did they use bone and ivory,
jade and silver, for ornament?
Had they an epic poem?
Did they distinguish between speech and singing?

Sir, their light hearts turned to stone.
It is not remembered whether in gardens
stone gardens illumined pleasant ways.
Perhaps they gathered once to delight in blossom,
but after their children were killed
there were no more buds.
Sir, laughter is bitter to the burned mouth.
A dream ago, perhaps. Ornament is for joy.
All the bones were charred.
it is not remembered. Remember,
most were peasants; their life
was in rice and bamboo.

When peaceful clouds were reflected in the paddies
and the water buffalo stepped surely along terraces,
maybe fathers told their sons old tales.

When bombs smashed those mirrors
there was time only to scream.

There is an echo yet
of their speech which was like a song.

It was reported their singing resembled
the flight of moths in moonlight.

Who can say? It is silent now.

SCIL Faith Olympiad

Category: Humorous Poetry

Age Category: Open Category

1. The People Upstairs by Ogden Nash

The people upstairs are a curious sight
They're always having parties day and night
They dance on the furniture with energy and zest
And when they get tired, they take a rest

They're always having meetings, or so they say
But all they do is make a lot of noise all day
They're always getting ready, or so they claim

But they never seem to get anywhere, it's all just a game

The people upstairs are a noisy crew

They're always blasting music, and stomping too

They're always yelling, and screaming with glee

And when I'm trying to sleep, they're having a spree

They're a curious bunch, the people upstairs

They're always up to something, that's for sure

They're loud and they're boisterous, and they never sleep

And I'm the one who's driven crazy, while they're having a ball up there, it seems!

The people upstairs all practise ballet

Their living room is a bowling alley

Their bedroom is full of conducted tours.

Their radio is louder than yours,

They celebrate week-ends all the week.

When they take a shower, your ceilings leak.

They try to get their parties to mix

By supplying their guests with Pogo sticks,

And when their fun at last abates,

They go to the bathroom on roller skates.

They eat bananas with the lights turned out,

They play the stock market with a Ouija board.

Their dog is named Psyche, the cat Pavlov.

They're always getting ready to be moved.

They're always expecting the one that got away.
Their apartment's a mess, what a lovely mess!
They're always looking for a place to rest.

2. The Owl Who Wasn't Wise by Edward Lear

I'm an owl, and I'm here to say,
That I'm not wise, in a most peculiar way.
I perch on a tree, with a frown on my face,
And wonder what's the point of this whole time and space.

I look at the world, with my big round eyes,
And see all the fools, with their silly surprise.
They rush and they hurry, with a frantic pace,
While I sit and think, with a puzzled face.

My values are skewed, my perspective's awry,
I see the world upside down, and wonder why.
I'm a master of nonsense, a king of whimsy too,
But wisdom? Ha! I'm not sure what that thing can do.

I know a young fellow, a most curious sight,
Who wears his hat on his chin, and his boots on his feet tonight.
He says he's a genius, with a mind so divine,
But I think he's just owl-ish, and doesn't quite align.

He talks of the future, and the past with a grin,

But I'm not sure he knows what's happening within.
He's a master of words, but not of sense,
A juggler of phrases, with no real pretense.

He speaks of great wisdom, with a knowing glance,
But his actions are silly, a merry dance.
He chases after nonsense, with feet so light,
And laughs at the serious, with pure delight.
He's a weaver of tales, with words so bright,
But the meaning gets lost, in the whimsy of night.

His friends all admire him, with a chuckle and grin,
For his antics are endless, his humor within.
He's a jester, a fool, with a heart full of cheer,
And though he may not be wise, he's welcome here.

3. Listening to the Pakistani Taxi-driver by Ouyang Yu

You'd never know who you'd run into when you catch a cab
To the airport, in Melbourne, you'd have dozens of ethnics such as Somalis
Indians, Sri Lankans, Iraqis, even Chinese
This guy whose name is, vaguely, Rizwan
Tells me that he's from Pakistan and is going to get his master's degree
While driving this taxi and he says:

I mean I can easily get 385 dollars, not a week, but a fortnight

From the central link but I don't like the idea
Because we don't have the habit of falling back on the government
As some Aussies do whose habit it is to always get it whenever they can
Generation after generation
For me, I work, my mind work, my hands work, and I am happy
And when I get my degree I may go elsewhere for a job
What they should do here is get you a job, not money for nothing
This friend of mine, a sheik from Saudi Arabia, who's invested millions
In Australia but is pulling out because it's such a dung country
If you do business these days you do with China, its economy is so strong
Not even America can catch up and what democracy are you talking about
Every country every people have their own cultures systems religions and beliefs
If you import American democracy you end up with Iraq and
The kind of destruction we daily see
It's not good enough
I don't worship anyone these days except what's his name in North Korea
Who's got the guts and dares stand up against the American balderdash
You have to be strong in this world and do your own thing
And not let others run all over you
So you are going to Denmark?
I've got an uncle there although I've never been there
Hopefully, one of these days.

4. How Pleasant to Know Mr. Lear! By Edward Lear

"How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!"

Who has written such volumes of stuff!
Some think him ill-tempered and queer,
But a few think him pleasant enough.

His mind is concrete and fastidious,
His nose is remarkably big;
His visage is more or less hideous,
His beard it resembles a wig.

He has ears, and two eyes, and ten fingers,
Leastways if you reckon two thumbs;
Long ago he was one of the singers,
But now he is one of the dumbs.

He sits in a beautiful parlour,
With hundreds of books on the wall;
He drinks a great deal of Marsala,
But never gets tipsy at all.

He has many friends, lay men and clerical,
Old Foss is the name of his cat;
His body is perfectly spherical,
He weareth a runcible hat.

When he walks in waterproof white,
The children run after him so!
Calling out, "He's gone out in his night-
Gown, that crazy old Englishman, oh!"

He weeps by the side of the ocean,
 He weeps on the top of the hill;
He purchases pancakes and lotion,
 And chocolate shrimps from the mill.

He reads, but he cannot speak, Spanish,
 He cannot abide ginger beer:
Ere the days of his pilgrimage vanish,
 How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!