

**2008 Poems:** “When I Have Fears” (John Keats) and “Mezzo Cammin” (Henry W. Longfellow)

**Prompt:** In the two poems below, Keats and Longfellow reflect on similar concerns. Read the poems carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two poems, analyzing the poetic techniques each writer uses to explore his particular situation.

### **When I Have Fears**

When I have fears that I may cease to be  
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,  
Before high-piled books, in charactery,  
Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain;  
5 When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,  
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,  
And think that I may never live to trace  
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;  
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,  
10 That I shall never look upon thee more,  
Never have relish in the faery power  
Of unreflecting love; - then on the shore  
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think  
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

1818 ---John Keats (1795-1821)

### **Mezzo Cammin<sup>1</sup>**

**Written at Boppard on the Rhine August 25, 1842,  
Just Before Leaving Home**

Half my life is gone, and I have let  
The years slip from me and have not fulfilled  
The aspiration of my youth, to build  
Some tower of song with lofty parapet.  
5 Not indolence, nor pleasure, nor the fret  
Of restless passions that would not be stilled,  
But sorrow, and a care that almost killed,  
Kept me from what I may accomplish yet;  
Though, half-way up the hill, I see the Past  
19 Lying beneath me with its sounds and sights,--  
A city in the twilight dim and vast,  
With smoking roofs, soft bells, and gleaming lights,--  
And hear above me on the autumnal blast  
The cataract<sup>2</sup> of Death far thundering from the heights.

1842 --Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

<sup>1</sup> The title is from the first line of Dante's Divine Comedy: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" ("Midway upon the journey of our life").