

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 Cammin¹

**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 cataract² of Death far thundering from the heights.

1842 --Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

¹ 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").