

# Level 2 Speaking Verse and Prose:

## Grade 4 – Verse

### Titles in Level 2 Speaking Verse and Prose: Grade 4 – Verse

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### The Kitten in the Falling Snow

The year-old kitten  
has never seen snow,  
fallen or falling, until now  
this late winter afternoon.

He sits with wide eyes  
at the firelit window, sees  
white things falling  
from black trees.

Are they petals, leaves or birds?  
they cannot be the cabbage whites  
he battered briefly with his paws,  
or the puffball seeds in summer grass.

They make no sound, they have no wings  
and yet they can whirl and fly around  
until they swoop like swallows, and  
disappear into the ground.

'Where do they go?' he questions,  
with eyes ablaze, following their flight  
into black stone. So I put him  
out into the yard, to make their acquaintance.

He has to look up at them: when one  
blanches his coral nose, he sneezes,  
and flicks a few from his whiskers, from  
his sharpened ear, that picks up silences.

He catches one on a curled-up paw  
and licks it quickly, before  
its strange milk fades, then sniffs its ghost,  
a wetness, while his black coat

shivers with stars of flickering frost.

He shivers at something else that makes his thin  
tail swish, his fur stand on end! 'What's this?...'   
Then he suddenly scoots in to safety

and sits again with wide eyes  
at the firelit window, sees  
white things falling  
from black trees.

*By James Kirkup*

## Encounter

We were riding through frozen fields in a wagon at dawn.  
A red wing rose in the darkness.

And suddenly a hare ran across the road.  
One of us pointed to it with his hand.

That was long ago. Today neither of them is alive,  
Not the hare, nor the man who made the gesture.

O my love, where are they, where are they going  
The flash of a hand, streak of movement, rustle of pebbles.  
I ask not out of sorrow, but in wonder.

*By Czeslaw Milosz*

*Translated by Czeslaw Milosz and Lillian Vallee*

## Barter

Life has loveliness to sell,  
All beautiful and splendid things,  
Blue waves whitened on a cliff,  
Soaring fire that sways and sings,  
And children's faces looking up  
Holding wonder like a cup.  
Life has loveliness to sell,  
Music like a curve of gold,  
Scent of pine trees in the rain,  
Eyes that love you, arms that hold,  
And for your spirit's still delight,  
Holy thoughts that star the night.  
Spend all you have for loveliness,  
Buy it and never count the cost;  
For one white singing hour of peace  
Count many a year of strife well lost,  
And for a breath of ecstasy  
Give all you have been, or could be.

*By Sara Teasdale*

## The Disappointed

There are songs enough for the hero  
Who dwells on the heights of fame;  
I sing for the disappointed—  
For those who missed their aim.  
I sing with a tearful cadence  
For one who stands in the dark,  
And knows that his last, best arrow  
Has bounded back from the mark.  
I sing for the breathless runner,  
The eager, anxious soul,  
Who falls with his strength exhausted,  
Almost in sight of the goal;  
For the hearts that break in silence,  
With a sorrow all unknown,  
For those who need companions,  
Yet walk their ways alone.  
There are songs enough for the lovers  
Who share love's tender pain,  
I sing for the one whose passion  
Is given all in vain.  
For those whose spirit comrades  
Have missed them on the way,  
I sing, with a heart o'erflowing,  
This minor strain to-day.  
And I know the Solar system  
Must somewhere keep in space

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A prize for that spent runner  
Who barely lost the race.  
For the plan would be imperfect  
Unless it held some sphere  
That paid for the toil and talent  
And love that are wasted here.

*By Ella Wheeler Wilcox*

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### **Empty House**

I hate our house when there's no one in  
I miss my family and I miss the din.  
The rooms and the hallway seem cold and bare  
And the silence hangs like dust in the air.  
What's that sound upstairs that makes me start  
Driving Fear like an icicle through my heart?  
I'm imagining things, there's nobody there –  
But I have to make sure so I creep up the stair.  
I stand holding my breath by the bedroom door  
And hear something rustling across the floor.  
Then a scratching sound, a tiny cry!  
I can't seem to breathe, my throat is dry.  
In the silence I hear my own heart beating  
And the rumble of water in the central heating.  
I should go in but I just don't dare  
So I call aloud, 'Is anyone there?'  
Nobody answers. I push open the door.  
A fluttering shadow crosses the floor.  
And now I see him, now understand  
And I gather him gently in my hands.  
'I won't hurt you, my friend. Don't flutter, don't start.'  
But his body beats wild like a feathered heart.  
Out through the window, watch him wheel and fly  
Carrying my fear across the sky.

*By Gareth Owen*

## Playthings

Child, how happy you are sitting in the dust, playing with a broken twig all the morning.

I smile at your play with that little bit of a broken twig.

I am busy with my accounts, adding up figures by the hour.

Perhaps you glance at me and think, 'What a stupid game to spoil your morning with!'

Child, I have forgotten the art of being absorbed in sticks and mud-pies.

I seek out costly playthings, and gather lumps of gold and silver.

With whatever you find you create your glad games, I spend both my time and my strength over things I never can obtain.

In my frail canoe I struggle to cross the sea of desire, and forget that I too am playing a game.

*By Rabindranath Tagore*

## Herbert Glerbett

Herbert Glerbett, rather round,  
swallowed sherbet by the pound,  
fifty pounds of lemon sherbet  
went inside of Herbert Glerbett.

With that glob inside his lap  
Herbert Glerbett took a nap,  
and as he slept, the boy dissolved,  
and from the mess a thing evolved—

a thing that is a ghastly green,  
a thing the world had never seen,  
a puddle thing, a gooey pile  
of something strange that does not smile.

Now if you're wise, and if you're sly,  
you'll swiftly pass this creature by,  
it is no longer Herbert Glerbett.  
Whatever it is, do not disturb it.

*By Jack Prelutsky*

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## I Ask My Mother to Sing

She begins, and my grandmother joins her.  
Mother and daughter sing like young girls.  
If my father were alive, he would play  
his accordion and sway like a boat.

I've never been in Peking, or the Summer Palace,  
nor stood on the great Stone Boat to watch  
the rain begin on Kuen Ming Lake, the picnickers  
running away in the grass.

But I love to hear it sung;  
how the waterlilies fill with rain until  
they overturn, spilling water into water,  
then rock back, and fill with more.

Both women have begun to cry.  
But neither stops her song.

*By Li-Young Lee*