



## *Thanatopsis*

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- William Cullen Bryant wrote “Thanatopsis” when he was about seventeen. He was influenced by the British “Graveyard Poets” (ex. Thomas Gray and Robert Blair), William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He later added lines 1-17 and 73-81, which now frame the poem.
  - Lines 1-17 and 73-81 are the speaker’s voice
  - Lines 17-73 are Nature’s voice (personification) speaking to humans about death

After reading the poem, consider the following questions.

1. What Greek words were combined to make the title? How do the meanings of these words contribute to the meaning of the poem?
2. Define the following words; consider the context of the poem: shroud, pall, narrow house, and sepulcher. How do these words and their meanings impact the meaning of the poem?
3. Is this a poem about life or is this a poem about death? Explain your answer.
4. The tone of this poem shifts. What is the tone in the first part of the poem? When does the tone shift? What is the tone after the shift?
5. “Thanatopsis” is an ELEGY. What is an elegy?
6. “Thanatopsis” is a poem that can be interpreted in several ways. What elements of Romanticism are found in this poem?

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  - Lines 1-17 and 73-81 are the speaker’s voice
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- Think back to the notes you took on the powerpoint...
  - Romantics viewed the universe as a living organism; the dead become part of Nature’s rebirth.
  - This thought is meant to be comforting because it emphasizes the unity of the living and the dead.