

Poem #7

This one's not a poem at all!

This is an excerpt from a speech called *The Man in the Arena: Citizenship in a Republic* that Teddy Roosevelt gave at the Sorbonne in Paris on April 23, 1910. It was originally written in normal paragraph form, but it's been put in poetry form for ease of memorization.

Teddy Roosevelt said:

It is not the critic who counts;
not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled,
or where the doer of deeds could have done better.
The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena;
whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood;
who strives valiantly;
who errs and comes short again and again;
who knows the great enthusiasms,
the great devotions,
and spends himself in a worthy cause;
who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement;
and who at the worst, if he fails,
at least fails while daring greatly;
so that his place shall never be
with those cold and timid souls
who know neither victory nor defeat.



This excerpt from Roosevelt's speech addresses the tendency people have to belittle and attack those in charge.

Roosevelt argues that it is better to be doing and do it wrong than to never try to do anything at all. You may never lose, but you will never win either. Roosevelt himself was a doer, and he is famous for his ebullient personality.

Taking it apart

Teddy Roosevelt said:

It is not the **critic** who **counts**;

not the man who points out how the **strong** man **stumbled**,

or where the **doer** of **deeds** could have **done** better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena;

whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood;

who strives valiantly;

who errs and comes short again and again;

who knows the great enthusiasms,

the great devotions,

and spends himself in a worthy cause;

who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement;

and who at the worst, if he fails,

at least fails while daring greatly;

so that his place shall never be

with those cold and timid souls

who know neither victory nor defeat.

Even though it's not a poem, Roosevelt uses alliteration (repetition of the beginning consonant sound) to add emphasis and rhythm to the words.

What kinds of things are done in arenas?

Notice how often he repeats the words "who" and "and." What effect do you think this has?

The important thing is to attempt something great, not to be satisfied with never trying anything at all.

Can you think of applications of this idea in politics?
Sports? Entertainment?

Memorizing it

This is a fairly simple piece to memorize because so many of the lines are short and the words are easily spoken. Try saying the poem aloud, starting with just the first line, and then saying the first and second lines, then the first, second, and third, and so on. As you practice, put emphasis on the underlined words. After you have done the entire poem, use a highlighter to choose different words to emphasize and repeat the exercise. Speak slowly with strong inflections.

Teddy Roosevelt said:

It is **not** the **critic** who counts;
not the man who points out how the **strong** man **stumbled**,
or where the **doer** of **deeds** could have done **better**.
The **credit** belongs to the man who is actually **in** the arena;
whose face is marred by **dust** and **sweat** and **blood**;
who **strives** valiantly;
who **errs** and comes short **again** and **again**;
who knows the great **enthusiasms**,
the great **devotions**,
and spends himself in a **worthy cause**;
who at the **best** knows in the end the **triumph** of high achievement;
and who at the **worst**, if he **fails**,
at least **fails** while daring **greatly**;
so that **his** place shall **never** be
with those **cold** and **timid** souls
who know **neither** victory **nor** defeat.