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THE BUILDERS

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Talking about the poem

- Who do you think are the builders of our life?
- If we build our own house how careful should we be?
- Compare building a house to building a life. Is it interesting? Let's see after reading the poem.

Read the poem to find out.....

All are architects of Fate,
Working in these walls of Time;
Some with massive deeds and great,
Some with ornaments of rhyme.

Nothing useless is, or low;
Each thing in its place is best;
And what seems but idle show
Strengthens and supports the rest.

For the structure that we raise,
Time is with materials filled;
Our to-days and yesterdays
Are the blocks with which we build.

Truly shape and fashion these;
Leave no yawning gaps between;
Think not, because no man sees,
Such things will remain unseen.

In the elder days of Art,
Builders wrought with greatest care
Each minute and unseen part;
For the Gods see everywhere.

Let us do our work as well,
Both the unseen and the seen;
Make the house, where Gods may dwell,
Beautiful, entire, and clean.

Else our lives are incomplete,
Standing in these walls of Time,
Broken stairways, where the feet
Stumble as they seek to climb.

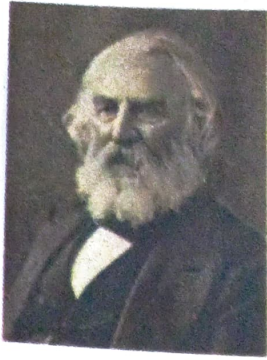
Build to-day, then, strong and sure,
With a firm and ample base;
And ascending and secure
Shall to-morrow find its place.

Thus alone can we attain
To those turrets, where the eye
Sees the world as one vast plain,
And one boundless reach of sky.

GLOSSARY

- Massive (adj.)** /'mæsɪv/ : (M) very large, heavy and solid
(U) The explosion made a massive hole in the ground.
- Yawning (v)** /jɔ:n/ : (M) to open your mouth wide and breathe in deeply through it, usually because you are tired or bored.
(U) We couldn't help yawning during the speech.
- Wrought (v)** /rɔ:t/ : (M) {(formal or literary) used only in past tense} caused something to happen, especially a change
(U) The Hud-Hud cyclone wrought havoc in the city of Vizag.
- Stumble (n)** /'stʌmbl/ : (M) a problem or temporary failure when you are on the way to achieve something, an act of falling
(U) After a slight stumble backwards, he regained his balance.
- Ample (adj)** /'æmpl/ : (M) enough or more than enough
(U) There was ample time to reach the airport.
- Turret (n)** /'tʌrət/ : (M) a small tower on top of a building, especially a castle
(U) A turret containing a huge bell was added to the castle.

About the poet



Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, a great American poet born on 27th February, 1807 in Portland, Maine. He was a commanding figure in the cultural life of nineteenth-century America. He became a national literary figure by the 1850s and a world-famous personality by the time of his death in 1882. He was a poet, educator, traveller, a linguist, and a romantic whose poetry was rooted in American life and history. He is said to be the first American poet who didn't try to be just like the British poets.

Longfellow embraced the genre of Transcendentalism and wrote many lyric poems known for their musicality. His famous poems include *Paul Revere's Ride*, *The song of Hiawatha*, and *Evangeline*.

About the poem

The present poem is a simple metaphor where human life is compared to a building and we, the human beings, are the builders. The poem is about how we make every day, how we create our own future; building them out of every hour we live. The premise as a whole is that each day is a block we lay down to build the characteristics of our life. What blocks we lay down is up to us because at the end of the day, our life is based on the blocks we chose. We should watch what we do as it affects our later lives.

The poet advises on how to make each day mean something describing each day as a building block. Once you place your block of yesterday you have to move on and try to make tomorrow's block stronger. You can make the structure the way you want. However, a skyscraper isn't built overnight nor are our lives. It takes time, hard work, resilience, perseverance, commitment, honesty and integrity to build a good and strong character.

Finally the poet says in the last stanza that with all the hard work if we can build a tall building, it is from that higher perspective, from that wiser angle that we can see what's worth building our lives around. It is from that perspective that we can see "the world as one vast plain". We need to build ourselves with such high values that the world and its many differences disappear for us and then we will be able to reach greater heights to the boundless sky.

The poet uses anastrophe to say, "Time is with materials filled" to state that building something worthwhile takes time. Time is also mentioned many times to reiterate that it is imperative to make the most of what time we do have. The poem is so musical with seven syllables in each line. The last word of first line rhymes with the one in the third line and the last word of the second line rhymes with the one in the fourth line in each stanza.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer the following questions in a line or two

1. How is time important in building our life?
2. How can we make good dwell in our house?
3. What is the advantage of building tall structures, according to the poem?
4. Why/ how is a building compared to our life?
5. 'Leave no yawning gaps between'. Discuss this line with your classmates.

Answer the following questions in 10-15 lines each.

1. What is the appropriateness of the title 'The Builders?' Do you agree with the poet about building one's own life?
2. What is the central idea of the poem 'The Builders?'

Annotations

Annotate the following in 10-15 lines each. A model annotation is given below.

1. All are architects of Fate,
Working in these walls of Time;

Context These lines are taken from the poem 'The Builders,' written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In this poem, the poet compares human beings to builders. The structure they build is their life. The walls of this structure called life are made up of time.

Explanation The poet says that we are the builders of our own fate. We choose and plan for our future. Hence we are the architects of our fate. Time is the most important thing to build our life carefully. He wants to say that to build something worthwhile takes time. Each and every minute, we spend, becomes a part of the building.

General relevance The poet says that we need to be careful in spending our time on good things. Because what we do now affects our later lives. So we should use our time fruitfully to make our life more meaningful in the future.

2. Time is with materials filled;
Our to-days and yesterdays
Are the blocks with which we build
3. Let us do our work as well,
Both the unseen and the seen;
4. Thus alone can we attain
To those turrets, where the eye
Sees the world as one vast plain,