

Quotations about a Life Worth Living

Socrates*

The unexamined life is not worth living.

Albert Einstein, 1932

Only a life lived for (in service to) others is the life worth while.

Friedrich Nietzsche

He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.

Bessie Allen Stanley (though often attributed to Emerson)*

The man is a success who has lived well, laughed often, and loved much; who has gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who leaves the world better than he found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem, or a rescued soul; who never lacked appreciation of earth's beauty or failed to express it; who looked for the best in others and gave the best he had.

Albert Einstein, 1930

Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.

Will Rogers

Live in such a way that you would not be ashamed to sell your parrot to the town gossip.

Quotations about Virtue

Confucius*

The superior man thinks always of virtue; the common man thinks of comfort.

Confucius

To practice five things under all circumstances constitutes perfect virtue; these five are gravity, generosity of soul, sincerity, earnestness, and kindness.

Aristotle

The greatest virtues are those which are most useful to other persons.

Marcus Tullius Cicero

The whole of virtue consists in its practice.

Maya Angelou, 2009

Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage.

C. S. Lewis, 1944

Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.

Quotations about Life's Compasses

Steven Covey

Live your life by a compass, not a clock.

Daniel Boone*

Having an exciting destination is like setting a needle in your compass. From then on, the compass knows only one point – its ideal. And it will faithfully guide you there through the darkest nights and fiercest storms.

Michelangelo

It is necessary to keep one's compass in one's eyes and not in the hand, for the hands execute, but the eye judges.

Condoleeza Rice

Education is of no value and talent is worthless—unless you have an unwavering aim. Never find yourself without a compass.

Vincent Van Gogh

Conscience is a man's compass.

Quotations from Texts and Authors in This Unit

Marge Piercy, “To Be of Use”

*The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.*

George Saunders, “Advice to Graduates”

Since, according to me, your life is going to be a gradual process of becoming kinder and more loving: Hurry up. Speed it along. Start right now.

Naomi Shihab Nye, “Kindness”

*Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.*

Annie Dillard, “Living Like Weasels”

I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you.

Denise Levertov, "Sojourns in the Parallel World"

*We live our lives of human passions,
cruelties, dreams, concepts,
crimes and the exercise of virtue
in and beside a world devoid
of our preoccupations, free
from apprehension—though affected,
certainly, by our actions. A world
parallel to our own though overlapping.
We call it 'Nature'*

Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken"

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Emily Esfahani Smith, "There's More to Life Than Being Happy"

By putting aside our selfish interests to serve someone or something larger than ourselves – by devoting our lives to 'giving' rather than 'taking' — we are not only expressing our fundamental humanity, but are also acknowledging that there is more to the good life than the pursuit of simple happiness.

Robert Frost, "Mending Wall"

*Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.*

Gwendolyn Brooks, "A Song in the Front Yard"

*I've stayed in the front yard all my life.
I want a peek at the back
Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows.*

Ben Hecht, "Fog Patterns"

Yes, we are all lost and wandering in the thick mists. We have no destinations. The city is without outlines. And the drift of figures is a meaningless thing. Figures that are going nowhere and coming from nowhere.

Tarfia Faizullah, "Necessary Failures"

To be informed by place, but not beholden. To fail, but with beauty, in my crossing. To be unafraid as I carry the newness of myself forward with its distinct histories—to honor the shine of each of the selves which make me, to honor the seams between.

** Quotations examined by all students in Section 1, Lesson 1. Others selected by students.*