It’s all I have to bring today—
Poem by Emily Dickinson

We Alone
Poem by Alice Walker

Can you be RICH without money?

If you hear that people are wealthy, you probably think they have a lot of money. Perhaps you imagine that they own expensive things like jewels, antiques, and designer goods. But does wealth always have to refer to material objects? The poets whose works you are about to read would like us to find riches in more common places.

QUICKWRITE What types of non-material things do you consider part of your wealth? Family? Friends? Pets? With a small group, discuss the everyday things that can lend richness to your life.
● LITERARY ANALYSIS: RECURRING THEME
You already know that the message of a literary work is called the theme. When the same message is found in different works, it is called a recurring theme. The following poems were written in different centuries by poets of different cultures and backgrounds, but they express a similar idea: common things should be considered valuable. As you read, notice how each poet develops this recurring theme. Pay attention to
• the speaker’s feelings and beliefs
• important statements the speaker makes
• images and details that stand out
• repeated words and phrases

● READING STRATEGY: SET A PURPOSE FOR READING
Your purpose for reading the two poems is to compare the way the poets communicate the recurring theme. After you’ve read the poems once, go back and read them again. This time, take notes in a chart like the one shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recurring Theme: Common things should be considered valuable.</th>
<th>“It’s all I have to bring today”</th>
<th>“We Alone”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What strong feelings or beliefs does the speaker express?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Which images and details stand out?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Which words and phrases are repeated?</td>
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Meet the Authors

Emily Dickinson
1830–1886
An Unsung Talent
In 1862, Emily Dickinson read an announcement in a magazine asking for the work of new poets. Dickinson sent several of her poems to the editor, asking him if her work “breathed.” The editor thought she had talent, but he didn’t like her use of rhythm, and he asked her to correct her punctuation and capitalization. Dickinson chose to keep her poems in a box, unchanged. After she died, her sister found this wealth of poems and had them published. Dickinson is now considered one of America’s greatest poets.

Alice Walker
born 1944
Ground-Breaker
Alice Walker was born in a small town in Georgia where her part-Cherokee mother and African-American father worked as tenant farmers. Although the family did not have much money, Walker’s parents made sure there were always books in the house. Walker began writing at around age eight. She also made up many stories that she never put on paper, because she feared her brothers might find them and make fun of her. Today, Walker is a world-renowned author. She was the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in fiction.

Authors Online
Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML8-625

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
It's all I have to bring today—
This, and my heart beside—
This, and my heart, and all the fields—
And all the meadows wide—
Be sure you count—should I forget
Some one the sum could tell—
This, and my heart, and all the Bees
Which in the Clover dwell.

Emily Dickinson

**Analyze Visuals**
How might you feel if you were in the setting depicted in this picture?

**RECURRING THEME**
What images of nature do you find in the poem?
We alone can devalue gold
by not caring
if it falls or rises
in the marketplace.
5 Wherever there is gold
there is a chain, you know,
and if your chain
is gold
so much the worse
for you.  

Feathers, shells
and sea-shaped stones
are all as rare.

This could be our revolution:
15 To love what is plentiful
as much as
what is scarce. 

RECURRING THEME
Reread lines 14–17 and
paraphrase the speaker’s
statement.
Comprehension

1. **Recall** In “It’s all I have to bring today—,” what does the speaker bring?

2. **Recall** According to the speaker in “We Alone,” how can people decrease the value of gold?

3. **Recall** In “We Alone,” what items in nature are as rare as gold?

Literary Analysis

4. **Visualize** What mental pictures did you create as you read “It’s all I have to bring today—”? Describe how you visualized the speaker, the setting, and the situation in this poem.

5. **Interpret Poetry** In “It’s all I have to bring today—,” the word *this* is repeated in lines 2, 3, and 7. What do you think *this* might refer to—the speaker, the poem, or something else? Support your ideas.

6. **Analyze Symbol** A symbol is a person, place, or thing that stands for something beyond itself. In “We Alone,” what ideas does the chain represent? Support your response.

7. **Draw Conclusions** Reread the last stanza of “We Alone.” What are some “plentiful” things that we should love as much as or more than the scarce things?

8. **Evaluate** Which poem more clearly expresses the theme that common things should be considered valuable? Support your answer with details.

Comparing Theme

9. **Set a Purpose for Reading** Now that you’ve read both poems, finish filling in your chart. Then start thinking about the similarities and differences in how the poems express the theme.

<table>
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<th>&quot;It’s all I have to bring today—&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;We Alone&quot;</th>
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<tr>
<td>What strong feelings or beliefs does the speaker express?</td>
<td>She offers only her heart and nature’s beauty.</td>
<td>The worth of gold is determined by people.</td>
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<td>Which images and details stand out?</td>
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**Can you be RICH without money?**

Do you think the speakers of these poems feel wealthy? Explain your answer.
Comparing Theme

Writing for Assessment

1. READ THE PROMPT

You’ve just read two poems that express similar ideas about wealth. In writing assessments, you will often be asked to compare literary selections that differ in some ways but share a recurring theme.

“It’s all I have to bring today—” and “We Alone” express this theme: common things should be considered valuable. In four or five paragraphs, compare and contrast how this theme is expressed in the poems. Focus on the speakers, images, and use of repetition in each poem. Support your judgments with references to both texts.

2. PLAN YOUR WRITING

Review your chart, thinking about the way each poem conveys the theme. Make sure you can cite words and phrases to support your notes. Then think about how you will set up your response.

- Option A: In one paragraph, describe how the recurring theme is developed in the first poem; in the next paragraph, describe how this theme is developed in the second poem; in a third paragraph, discuss similarities and differences in how the poems develop the theme.

- Option B: In one paragraph, compare how the speakers contribute to the theme; in a second paragraph, compare the use of imagery; in a third paragraph, compare the use of repetition.

Now, outline your essay. Then write a thesis statement that describes your main idea.

3. DRAFT YOUR RESPONSE

Introduction  Include the titles and the poets’ names. State the theme and your thesis.

Body  Using your outline and the details in your chart, describe how each poem develops the recurring theme. Include details from the poems to support your ideas.

Conclusion  End your essay by restating the recurring theme and your thesis. Include a final thought about why this theme is important.

Revision  Make sure the poem details you cite truly support your ideas.

Gather additional support from the poems if necessary.