

**“To an Athlete Dying Young” by A. E. Housman Poem Analysis
& The Band Perry “If I Die Young” Song Comparison Activity**

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Teacher’s Note

Due to copyright law, the song lyrics “If I Die Young” by The Band Perry is not included in this product. You can easily access the full text by clicking the following link and then print copies for your students or have your students view them digitally.

[“If I Die Young” by The Band Perry Lyrics](#)

[“If I Die Young” by The Band Perry Video](#)

Directions

Part 1: Read and analyze the poem “To an Athlete Dying Young” by A. E. Housman using the worksheet provided.

Part 2: Play the song “If I Die Young” by The Band Perry for your students. Provide them a copy of the lyrics if possible.

Part 3: Students will answer the questions based on the lyrics to “If I Die Young” by The Band Perry as well as the poem “To an Athlete Dying Young” by A. E. Housman on the worksheet provided.

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“To an Athlete Dying Young” by A. E. Housman

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

Today, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsmen of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields where glory does not stay,
And early though the laurel grows
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut,
And silence sounds no worse than cheers
After earth has stopped the ears.

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honours out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laurelled head
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland briefer than a girl's.



rout: (noun) in this context, "rout" refers to a large group or an unruly crowd.

laurel: (noun) bay leaves from a small evergreen tree or shrub; in Ancient Greek and Roman times, laurel leaves were made into a crown, bestowed upon someone as an award.

lintel: (noun) a type of beam used to support a door or window.

1. Who is the speaker talking to?

2. What occurred the first time they carried the young man home?

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3. What is the meaning of the second stanza? Where is home this time?

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4. Why does the speaker call the athlete a “smart lad”?

5. What does laurel symbolize? What metaphorically withers quicker than the rose?

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6. In stanza 5, what crowd of people is the speaker talking about? What does it mean when “the name dies before the man”?

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7. What is the meaning of the sixth stanza?

8. Why is the garland unwithered?

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9. What type of poem is this? How is it an example of apostrophe poetry?

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10. What is the theme of the poem?

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11. How is life like a race?

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12. Do you agree with the philosophy of the speaker? Do you think the message is sincere? Explain.

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“If I Die Young” by The Band Perry

1. What emotions do you feel while listening to this song?

2. What events in your life, if any, does this song make you think about? What lyrics stand out?

3. Who is the intended audience for this song? Why do you think this?

4. How would you classify the genre of this song?

5. What is the tone of this song?

6. What is the meaning of the following metaphor? “The sharp knife of a short life...”

7. What is the symbolism of laying her body down on a bed of roses?

8. What do the following lines mean? “A penny for my thoughts, oh no, I’ll sell ‘em for a dollar. They’re worth so much more after I’m a goner.”

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9. What is the message the artist is trying to convey in this song? What is the theme?

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10. Compare and contrast the poem “To an Athlete Dying Young” and the song “If I Die Young.”

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11. Which poem/song do you like better? Why?

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12. After death, how do you want to be remembered and celebrated?