“Psalm of Life” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*What The Heart Of The Young Man Said To The Psalmist.*

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,

Life is but an empty dream!

For the soul is dead that slumbers,

    And things are not what they seem.

5 Life is real! Life is earnest!

    And the grave is not its goal;

Dust thou art, to dust returnest,

Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,

10    Is our destined end or way;

But to act, that each to-morrow

    Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,

    And our hearts, though stout and brave,

15 Still, like muffled drums, are beating

    Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world’s broad field of battle,

    In the bivouac of Life,

Be not like dumb, driven cattle!

20 Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe’er pleasant!

    Let the dead Past bury its dead!

Act,— act in the living Present!

    Heart within, and God o’erhead!

25 Lives of great men all remind us

    We can make our lives sublime,

And, departing, leave behind us

    Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,

30    Sailing o’er life’s solemn main,

A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,

    Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,

    With a heart for any fate;

35 Still achieving, still pursuing,

    Learn to labor and to wait.

1. What is a “psalm”? Why is that diction choice important in conveying a theme of the poem?

2. What are the “mournful numbers” the speaker mentions in the opening stanza? Why doesn’t he want to hear them/read them? Are there “mournful numbers” that we have read in this class that suggest that life is nothing but an “empty dream”?

3. Explain the personification of the soul in the first stanza. What effect does it have on the meaning of the poem?

4. What does line 8 suggest about the speaker’s understanding of “the soul”?

5. Lines 11-12 basically state the subject of the poem. What is the speaker encouraging us to do?

6. Explain the metaphors of stanza 5.

7. The “footprints” stanzas create metaphors. What are those metaphors?

8. How would you describe the speaker of the poem? What sort of person is he?

9. Do you know what *carpe diem* is? How does it apply to this poem?