

## Count That Day Lost by George Eliot

### The Poem



**If you sit down at set of sun** - If you sit down at the end of the day

**And count the acts that you have done,** - And go over all the deeds that you have done during the day

**And, counting, find** - And while counting you can remember you did

**One self-denying deed, one word** - An act of self sacrifice, or said a word

**That eased the heart of him who heard,** - That made the person who heard it feel better

**One glance most kind** - A nice friendly look

**That fell like sunshine where it went** - That gave another person a warm feeling

**Then you may count that day well spent.** - Then you can consider your day good

**But if, through all the livelong day,** - But if during the whole day

**You've cheered no heart, by yea or nay** - You haven't made someone happy, by saying yes or no

**If, through it all** - If, when you go over all the deeds you have done during the day

**You've nothing done that you can trace** - You can't think of anything that you have done

**That brought the sunshine to one face** - That made someone smile

**No act most small** - Not even the smallest thing

**That helped some soul and nothing cost** – That helped someone for free and didn't cost him anything

**Then count that day as worse than lost.** – Then consider your day wasted

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## Background information

George Eliot was an English female writer and poetess. She lived in England during the Victorian Age in Queen Victoria's times (1837-1901). Although the Victorian Age was characterized by peace and prosperity, there were huge gaps between the rich and the poor. The lower classes lived in poverty. Poor children were forced to work hard in order to support their families instead of going to school. Eliot and her friends were openly critical of these conditions. For them, the writer's job was to help improve society. Their literary works reflected those bad times. Gradually, a sense of responsibility began to develop among the upper classes. They used their money and influence to demand better working conditions and education for the working class.

The background information puts the poem in a wider social perspective and context and gives insight to the poet's reasons for writing the poem. It deepens our understanding of her writing.

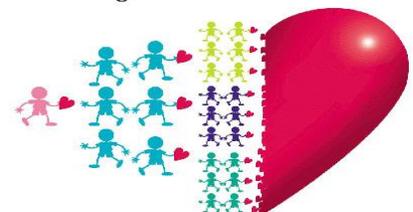
The poem implies that society as a whole can be improved if each of us does his or her part – and that it is every person's responsibility to do so.

## Relevant HOTS:

### Comparing and Contrasting.

- ❖ Comparing and contrasting acts: "One self-denying deed" and "One glance most kind". (Comparison: Both are acts we do for other people to make them feel good. Contrast: "One self-denying deed" – an act that makes us give up something for someone else. "One glance most kind" – an act you don't have to give up anything for.)

 **Pay it forward**



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- ❖ Comparing and contrasting the message of stanza one and the message of stanza two. (Stanza 1 talks about what makes a day well spent. A day when you do at least one good thing for others. For example, give a glance most kind / do a self-denying deed / say a kind word. Stanza 2 talks about what makes a day seem wasted. A day when you don't do anything helpful for another person. For example, cheered no heart / helped no one / nothing done to help someone. In the first stanza the message is that if you do something good, like to smile, you will have a good day and the message in the second stanza is that if you don't do something nice for someone, like you helped no one, your day is worse than lost.)
- ❖ Comparing and contrasting the two stanzas of the poem.

**Similarities:**

- Both stanzas are about a certain type of day.
- In both stanzas we count our deeds at the end of the day, at set of sun.
- There is repetition of words and phrases in both stanzas. For instance, the words "sunshine", "you" and others are repeated in both stanzas.
- Both stanzas have the same structure:
  - \* Each stanza consists of 8 lines.
  - \* The number of words in the lines is almost the same.
  - \* Each stanza opens with a conditional. Then, there is a list of deeds from the second line to the seventh line. Finally, the last line concludes the day ("count that day well spent" or "...worse than lost) according to your deeds.
- Both stanzas have the same rhyming scheme (aabccbdd / eefggfhh).



## Differences:

- The subject of the first stanza is doing at least one good deed every day. The outcome is that this will make your day worthwhile.
- The second stanza talks about a day in which you don't do anything helpful for another person. The outcome is that your day will be wasted and even worse than lost.
- The rhymes themselves are different.

## Explaining Cause and Effect

- ❖ If you do good deeds then your day is well spent. However, if you don't do anything good then your day is counted worse than lost.
- ❖ Why do you think the poet called the poem *Count That Day Lost*?
- ❖ Why does the poet refer to "a small act"?
- (To show that even when an act we do is small, and may seem unimportant to us, it can still make a big difference in someone's life).
- ❖ Why can one self-denying deed ease someone's heart?
- (It makes him feel better when he sees that someone else cares about him and is willing to make a self sacrifice deed for him).
- ❖ Why do we count our deeds at the end of the day?
- (The end of a period is always a time of reflection and self examination).

## The Setting

The poem takes place "at set of sun" which signifies the end of the day. The end of a period is always a time of reflection and self examination. That is why the poet chooses this time of day to count your deeds.

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## Analysis and Interpretation

The opening line of the poem uses direct address that is designed to teach a lesson. By openly addressing the reader, the speaker catches our attention and makes the poem personally relevant.

The two stanzas are similar when we look at the structure. First, each stanza begins with a conditional ("if you sit down...", "if through all the livelong day..."). Then, there is a list of deeds from the second line to the seventh line. Finally, the last line concludes the day ("count that day well spent" or "...worse than lost") according to your deeds. It means that the two stanzas are equally important. The stanzas have more things in common than not. It teaches us that they both carry an important message. The second stanza is as meaningful as the first, and the first stanza doesn't stand on its own. However, in terms of content the stanzas are completely different. The reason why George Eliot made such similar stanzas in terms of structure, but so different in content, comes to show us that although every day may look the same, it depends on you if it's a well-spent day or a day worse than lost. The days are designed by the deeds of the person, which means that a person can affect and set his or her own day.

The poet divides the poem into two stanzas to emphasize the difference between them. These days may appear similar on the surface, but there is a big difference between the two. The poem describes 2 possible results of a day. If at the end of the day you see that you did something good for someone, your day is well spent because of the happiness you brought to another person. However, if at the end of the day you see that you didn't do anything helpful that made someone happy, then you can see this day as worse than lost, because



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you had the opportunity to do something good for another person and you did not take it.

The division of the poem into 2 stanzas helps convey the message of the poem. There are 2 distinct kinds of days: worthwhile and worthless. The function of the second stanza is to strengthen and add to the message the reader gets.

### The Title

The poem is called "Count That Day Lost" because the poet wants us to think about all the things we did on any day. The title emphasizes the message of the poem. It is important that we do not waste our days and that we make sure we do good things for other people. If we didn't do something good for someone, then that day is lost. In addition, the poet might call the poem Count That Day Lost to create suspense and wonder: What day does the title imply? The answer to this question is given at the end of the poem. If you had the opportunity to become a better person, but you missed it, for you this is "worse than lost".

### The Repetition

When things are repeated it is easier to concentrate and remember them. The repetitions reinforce the message of the poem. They put the stress on the important elements that forward and convey the message. The poet repeats key terms, as *one* (lines 4 and 6), *count* (lines 2 and 8) and *counting* (line 3), and *you* (lines 1, 2, and 8). Such repetition adds to the poem's force and strengthens its meaning. The repetition of *you*, in particular, never lets us forget that the speaker is addressing each reader directly. The poem also seems forceful because of its heavy emphasis on verbs.

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The word count plays an important role in the poem by having two different meanings. The first is to number your acts in order to conclude whether your day was worthwhile or worthless. The second meaning is to regard and consider your day according to your deeds. Therefore, it is a key word in understanding and judging your day via self examination.

### Literary Terms:

**A simile** is a comparison in which one thing is described as being similar to another.

A simile usually includes the word **like** or **as**.

For example: She swims **like** a fish

He is as tall **as** his brother.

George Eliot uses a simile in the lines below:  
"One glance most kind - That fell **like** sunshine  
where it went"



The sun is used as an image because it is associated with a good feeling and positive things. When you do something good it works both ways: it makes the other person smile and the fact you made someone happy makes you feel good as well. Furthermore, the poem was written by an English poet in England where the sun is quite rare and therefore it is something that English people appreciate and look forward to.

The main images in the poem are "*sit down and count*" (lines 1, 2, 3, 8 and 16), "*bring sunshine*" (lines 7, 13), "*eased/cheered the heart*" (lines 5, 10). The pattern of images makes the stanzas similar, but the message is different – one is a good day and one is a wasted day. By using the image pattern, the poet wants to show us how easy it is to make a good day bad or a bad day good.

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**A metaphor** is using the characteristics of one thing to describe another. In other words, a metaphor is a way to compare by saying one thing **is** another thing.

For example: wings of love, an icy look, a sunny smile.

George Eliot uses a metaphor in the lines below:

"You've nothing done that you can trace  
That brought the sunshine to one face"

The poet uses the word "sunshine" to show how if you give someone a kind look it can make that person feel happy. The word "sunshine" has a positive connotation and your glance made someone feel warm, good and happy. Just like sunshine, a warm day brings warmth and light into someone's day.

### The Message

The poem has an educational message about how we should treat each other.

The message of the poem is that life without helping others around you is worthless. There is a price to acting (first stanza) and to in acting (second stanza).

Only if you do good deeds for the community you "gain" the day. On the contrary, if you don't do anything good or say some encouraging words to the people around you, you waste your day. Our time is well spent only if it is devoted to helping and encouraging other people, through a good deed or even a good word. A day spent helping people can be considered a really good day even if you do one small thing to help someone in a tiny way, the day has not been lost because of the joy you brought to another person. However, if at the end of your day, you can remember nothing that you did that was helpful or comforting or compassionate towards another person, consider the day lost because you had a golden opportunity to be a better person and you missed it.

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