

As the month of April winds down, we end the last Sunday of the month honoring Paul Laurence Dunbar during National Poetry Month.

Paul Laurence Dunbar (June 27, 1872 – February 9, 1906) was an American poet, novelist, and short story writer. Born in Dayton, Ohio, to parents who had been enslaved in Kentucky before the American Civil War, Dunbar began writing stories and verse when he was a child. He published his first poems at the age of 16 in a Dayton newspaper, and served as president of his high school's literary society.



Dunbar's popularity increased rapidly after his work was praised by William Dean Howells, a leading editor associated with *Harper's Weekly*. Dunbar became one of the first African-American writers to establish an international reputation. In addition to his poems, short stories, and novels, he also wrote the lyrics for the musical comedy *In Dahomey* (1903), the first all-African-American musical produced on Broadway in New York. The musical later toured in the United States and the United Kingdom. Suffering from tuberculosis, which then had no cure, Dunbar died in Dayton, Ohio, at the age of 33.

Much of Dunbar's more popular work in his lifetime was written in the "Negro dialect" associated with the antebellum South, though he also used the Midwestern regional dialect of James Whitcomb Riley. Dunbar also wrote in conventional English in other poetry and novels.

Source: Wikipedia

Two brief examples of Dunbar's work, the first in standard English and the second in dialect, demonstrate the diversity of Dunbar's works.

Sympathy

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting—
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!

A Death Song

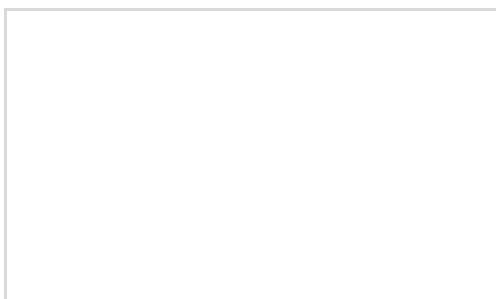
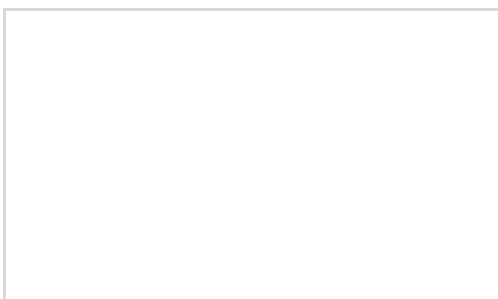
Lay me down beneaf de willers in de grass,
Whah de branch 'll go a-singin' as it pass.
An' w'en I 's a-layin' low,
I kin hyeah it as it go
Singin', "Sleep, my honey, tek yo' res' at las'."

Lay me nigh to whah hit meks a little pool,
An' de watah stan's so quiet lak an' cool,
Whah de little birds in spring,
Ust to come an' drink an' sing,
An' de chillen waded on dey way to school.

Let me settle w'en my shouldahs draps dey load
Nigh enough to hyeah de noises in de road;
Fu' I t'ink de las' long res'
Gwine to soothe my sperrit bes'
Ef I's layin' 'mong de t'ings I's allus knowed.

You will find the first verse of this poem engraved on the headstone of Paul Laurence Dunbar located in Section 101 Lot 3465.

The second verse of the poem is depicted in the stained glass window located in the Mausoleum.



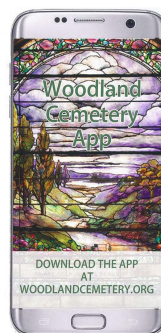


For more poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar, [click here to go to our Facebook page](#) where each day this month, we have posted a different poem by this talented man.

You can take your own walking tour at the cemetery or a virtual tour from the comfort of your couch by visiting our website at: woodlandcemetery.org/tours.

From your phone you will be prompted to download our app. Take one of 12 walking tours we have available for your enjoyment at the cemetery. If you are on your desktop, laptop or tablet, you can take the tour right from the tour page. We will be adding more tours so come back often to learn about the men and women who made it Great in Dayton.

[Download the mobile app for your phone by clicking here.](#)



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Using our app, you can:

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- Upload photos and videos
- Share memories with your family on Facebook

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