

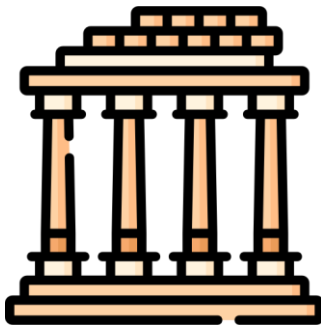


# INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR

<b>Class: Grade 8</b>	<b>Department: ENGLISH</b>	<b>Date of submission: October 2022</b>
<b>STUDY NOTES</b>	<b>Topic: A Nation's Strength (Poem)</b>	<b>Note: Reference Material</b>

## Central Idea of the Poem:

A Nation's Strength is a beautiful patriotic poem written by "R.W. Emerson." In this short poem, the poet reveals the secret of a nation's strength. The poet asks several questions to discover the secret of the nation's strength and he himself answers these questions. He says that the strength of a nation lies not in the wealth, power and pride but in its patriotic and determined men.



## Stanza wise meaning of the Poem:

*What makes a nation's pillars high  
And its foundations strong?  
What makes it mighty to defy  
The foes that round it throng?*

In this poem, the poet asks several questions to clarify what he wants to say. In the very beginning he equates a country to a big building. Then he puts a question as to what are the things which make its pillars high and foundation very strong. What are the things that can challenge its enemies who have crowded around it?

## Stanza 2

*"It is not gold. Its kingdoms grand  
Go down in battle shock;  
Its shafts are laid on sinking sand,  
Not on abiding rock."*



In the second stanza, the poet himself answers the questions raised in the first stanza. He says that it is not gold that makes a country great. Here gold stands for material progress of a nation. Material progress is not permanent. Wealth is also not permanent. It may come and it may go. The riches also make a person or a nation proud and arrogant. Any battle can ruin the material progress of a person or a nation. We have so many examples in history where even the mighty Empire may be

destroyed. The foundation made on the basis of wealth is like that made on sinking sand, not on durable rock. It may fall any time. It may be defeated by its enemies any time.



### Stanza 3

*Is it the sword? Ask the red dust  
Of empires passed away;  
The blood has turned their stones to rust,  
Their glory to decay.*

In this stanza, the poet again puts a question. Is it the sword that makes a nation strong? Here the sword stands for power. The people who are economically strong threaten others of dire consequences. They even fight and terrorize them to accept their supremacy. Similar is the case with the nations who are strong and powerful. They bully other nations to accept defeat. History is replete (full of) with examples of the fierce battles fought between such rulers. The poet suggests to us to ask the dust of the empires which are no more now about the result of such fierce battles. The bloodshed made the strong pillars of those empires weak as rust forces iron to decay. The glory of the powerful empires never lasted for long.

### Stanza 4

*And is it pride? Ah, that bright crown  
Has seemed to nations sweet;  
But God has struck its luster down  
In ashes at his feet.*



After explaining that battles never made a nation strong, the poet proceeds to say that the pride of wearing glittering crowns also never made their nations powerful. Emperors and kings in the past had been very fond of wearing bright crowns on their heads. They also felt proud of being powerful and owning great empires. But their pride had to fall down. Their glory had to fade away with the passage of time.



### Stanza 5

*Not gold but only men can make  
A people great and strong;  
Men who for truth and honor's sake  
Stand fast and suffer long.*

In stanza five, the poet explains his points clearly in a straight forward manner. He says that it is not gold or wealth that makes a nation strong. Only the people who can stand by truth and honesty and who can suffer long for

these great virtues can make their country great and strong.

These are the brave men who are always alert and active. These are the men who sacrifice their sleep for the safety and security of their country. These are the men who dare to challenge the enemies of their country and never run away from their duty. These are the men who make the pillars of their nation's deep, strong and take them high in the sky. They provide strong foundation to the edifice of their nation.

#### *Stanza 6*

*Brave men who work while others sleep,  
Who dare while others fly...  
They build a nation's pillars deep  
And lift them to the sky.*



These brave men work while others sleep. They dare to face problems when others run away. According to the poet, these are the only people who make the foundation of a nation strong and take their progress to the skies. Thus, the nation's strength is great men and they are what makes a nation great and strong.

#### **Theme:**

A national consciousness can only become a universal one if there are unfalteringly strong ideas which are shared among those who hold it. Emerson, through "A Nation's Strength" facilitates the development of such an idea, through the notion of a great nation. By dismissing wealth, violence and pride, factors which divide people's opinions greatly, and providing the image of a recipe for greatness which requires only the relentless human spirit, he is not only uniting the consciousness of a nation, but also paving the way for tangible development.

#### **Literary Devices**

##### **Antithesis:**

Antithesis is a figure of speech wherein two opposite words or ideas occur in the same sentence. For e.g: glory and decay Try to identify antithesis in stanza 2 and 3.

##### **Rhythm and rhyme**

The poem "A Nation's Strength" by Ralph Waldo Emerson is a six-stanza poem, each stanza having four lines. The poem follows the rhyme scheme ABAB, which is also called alternate rhyme. In the following example, the first line rhymes with the third while the second line rhymes with the fourth:

**Tone & Mood:**

- The speaker of this poem is a strong, high positioned person, who has a lot of influence on the people and someone whom the people trust and listen to. It is a poem that gives hope and a sense of nationalism.
- The mood of the poem is in favor of Democracy, because in the fifth stanza, it states that “only men can make a nation great and strong”; after ruling out pride, gold and the sword.