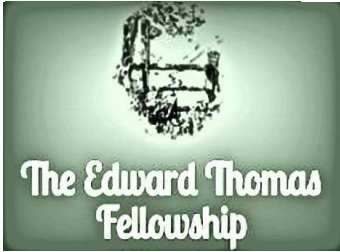


Year 12 & 13 Essay Competition



Win £100 and boost your UCAS form by writing a close reading of Edward Thomas's poem "Roads"

Introduction

The Edward Thomas Fellowship's principal aim is to keep the poet's work widely read and enjoyed. The Fellowship is delighted to be running the competition for the fifth consecutive year, with a £100 cash prize for students currently in Years 12-13.

The essay competition is an excellent opportunity for you to explore a poem by one of English Literature's most celebrated poets and thereby deepen your understanding of early twentieth century poetry. If you're thinking about studying English at university, it's also a great way to enrich your UCAS application.

You can find the winning entry and shortlisted candidates for last year's competition here: [Essay Competition 2025 / 2026 - Results Page and Competition Winners - The Edward Thomas Fellowship](#)

Edward Thomas...

... is regarded as an important WWI poet

... wrote 144 poems between 1914-1917 before his death in action in WWI

... takes a different approach to other WWI poets such as Wilfred Owen

... is concerned with the natural environment – highly relevant to discussions about climate change today.

Key Entry Details

The Poem: You can read “Roads” on pages 3-4 of this form.

Word count: 650 words minimum, 800 words maximum (*please note: entries may be up to 10% above the maximum word count – any words above 880 words will be disregarded*).

Deadline for submitting entry: 5pm, Monday 30th November 2026

Format: Please send your entry with the title of the documents formatted as “[Full name] – [name of your school]” e.g. “Joe Bloggs – ABC School”. Please also include your full name, the name of your school and the word count at the top of page 1 of your entry document. Please use a clear font with font size 12 or above. Please send the entry as a Word document (docx.) or pdf.

Submit entries by email to Robert Woolliams at: etfessaycomp@gmail.com

Results announced: Monday 1st February 2027

Prizes

- **First:** £100, publication in Edward Thomas Fellowship newsletter, one-year free print and digital membership of Edward Thomas Fellowship*
- **Two Runners up:** £50
- **Shortlist:** shortlisted students named in Edward Thomas Fellowship newsletter and on social media pages (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram)
- **All candidates:** one-year free digital membership of Edward Thomas Fellowship*

**Edward Thomas Fellowship membership includes newsletters, discounted events admission, information on competitions and more.*

The Judges

This year the competition will be judged by leading scholar of Edward Thomas, Professor Guy Cuthbertson.

Some Tips

Your entry should:

- Focus on a close reading of “Roads”
- Explore what you find interesting about “Roads”
- Look closely at what is special and distinctive about “Roads”
- Have a clear sense of the poem as a whole, with discussion moving between the detail and the bigger picture
- Be written in a clear and simple style, using technical literary vocabulary when relevant.

Roads

I love roads:
The goddesses that dwell
Far along invisible
Are my favourite gods.

Roads go on
While we forget, and are
Forgotten like a star
That shoots and is gone.

On this earth 'tis sure
We men have not made
Anything that doth fade
So soon, so long endure:

The hill road wet with rain
In the sun would not gleam
Like a winding stream
If we trod it not again.

They are lonely
While we sleep, lonelier
For lack of the traveller
Who is now a dream only.

From dawn's twilight
And all the clouds like sheep
On the mountains of sleep
They wind into the night.

The next turn may reveal
Heaven: upon the crest
The close pine clump, at rest
And black, may Hell conceal.

Often footsore, never
Yet of the road I weary,
Though long and steep and dreary,
As it winds on for ever.

Helen of the roads,
The mountain ways of Wales
And the Mabinogion tales,
Is one of the true gods,

Abiding in the trees,
The threes and fours so wise,
The larger companies,
That by the roadside be,

And beneath the rafter
Else uninhabited
Excepting by the dead;
And it is her laughter

At morn and night I hear
When the thrush cock sings
Bright irrelevant things,
And when the chanticleer

Calls back to their own night
Troops that make loneliness
With their light footsteps' press,
As Helen's own are light.

Now all roads lead to France
And heavy is the tread
Of the living; but the dead
Returning lightly dance:

Whatever the road bring
To me or take from me,
They keep me company
With their pattering,

Crowding the solitude
Of the loops over the downs,
Hushing the roar of towns
and their brief multitude.