Poem to Practice for the Midterm: “The Pomegranate” by Eavan Bolan

Note: Since you are doing this at home, you can look up the story of Ceres and Persephone if you don’t know it. It might remind you a bit of the Little Red Riding Hood story we were focusing on earlier. The poet is an Irish woman, so like British children, she would have been steeped in Greek and Roman literature in school. I won’t use a poem for the midterm that would require a lot of knowledge of allusions, though.

The only legend I have ever loved is

the story of a daughter lost in hell.

And found and rescued there.

Love and blackmail are the gist of it.

Ceres and Persephone the names.

And the best thing about the legend is

I can enter it anywhere. And have.

As a child in exile in

a city of fogs and strange consonants,

I read it first and at first I was

an exiled child in the crackling dusk of

the underworld, the stars blighted. Later

I walked out in a summer twilight

searching for my daughter at bed-time.

When she came running I was ready

to make any bargain to keep her.

I carried her back past whitebeams

and wasps and honey-scented buddleias.

But I was Ceres then and I knew

winter was in store for every leaf

on every tree on that road.

Was inescapable for each one we passed.

And for me.

It is winter

and the stars are hidden.

I climb the stairs and stand where I can see

my child asleep beside her teen magazines,

her can of Coke, her plate of uncut fruit.

The pomegranate! How did I forget it?

She could have come home and been safe

and ended the story and all

our heart-broken searching but she reached

out a hand and plucked a pomegranate.

She put out her hand and pulled down

the French sound for apple and

the noise of stone and the proof

that even in the place of death,

at the heart of legend, in the midst

of rocks full of unshed tears

ready to be diamonds by the time

the story was told, a child can be

hungry. I could warn her. There is still a chance.

The rain is cold. The road is flint-coloured.

The suburb has cars and cable television.

The veiled stars are above ground.

It is another world. But what else

can a mother give her daughter but such

beautiful rifts in time?

If I defer the grief I will diminish the gift.

The legend will be hers as well as mine.

She will enter it. As I have.

She will wake up. She will hold

the papery flushed skin in her hand.

And to her lips. I will say nothing.

By [Eavan Boland](https://www.poets.org/node/44736), 1944 From *In a Time of Violence*, published by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1994. Copyright © 1994 by Eavan Boland. All rights reserved. Used with permission.