“Richard Cory” – Edward Arlington Robinson (1897)

WHENEVER Richard Cory went down town,
    We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
    Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
    And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
    "Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king,
    And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
    To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
    And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
    Went home and put a bullet through his head.

Study and Analysis Questions
1. Identify the meter of the poem.
2. Identify the rhyme scheme of the poem.
3. How do the townspeople feel about Richard Cory? Give specific words or phrases from the poem.
4. How do women of the town feel about Richard Cory? Give evidence to support your answer.
5. Who is the speaker(s) of the poem? How would you characterize the speaker(s)? Support your answer with evidence from the poem.
6. Why might the speaker(s) “curse the bread”?
7. What is the CONNOTATION of the words “crown” and “imperially”?
8. Identify the simile in Line 9. Is this comparison consistent with the words in question #7?
9. List FIVE words which are NOT in the poem to describe Richard Cory.
10. What is the effect of having Richard Cory kill himself “one calm summer night”?
11. Why do you think Richard Cory kills himself?
12. What is the overall TONE of the poem? (check your “Style Analysis” handout for tone-words)
13. How does the theme of the poem reflect post-war America?
14. Explain how Richard Cory can be viewed as a “hollow man,” as T.S. Eliot terms many in the post-war world.
15. In a complete sentence, write a theme for the poem. (THEME: a broad idea in a story or literary work or a message or lesson conveyed by a written text. This message is usually about life, society or human nature. Themes often explore timeless and universal ideas.)