



CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB

[www.calwriters.org](http://www.calwriters.org)

## QUOTATIONS BY CALIFORNIA AUTHORS

*Some California authors have never lived anywhere but in the Golden State. Others were born here and moved on ... or relocated from elsewhere to California's coast, mountains, thriving cities or blissfully remote areas for inspiration.*

*California writers have written humorous, insightful, stirring and important words over the centuries. Their ideas move us to laugh, to ponder, to appreciate, and sometimes, they've changed the world. Here are some examples:*

### **Austin, Mary (Hunter) (1868-1934)**

"Man is a great blunderer going about in the woods, and there is no other except the bear makes so much noise." —

### **Bierce, Ambrose (1842 - c. 1914)**

"Mark how my fame rings out from zone to zone:  
A thousand critics shouting: 'He's unknown!'" —

"*Bore*: a person who talks when you wish him to listen." —

"*Edible*, *adj* .good to eat, and wholesome to digest, as a worm to a toad, a toad to a snake, a snake to a pig, a pig to a man, and a man to a worm." —

[On the use of the word "gubernatorial"]: "Eschew it; it is not English, is needless and bombastic. Leave it to those who call a political office a 'chair.' 'Gubernatorial chair' is good enough for them. So is hanging." —

[On "talented" for "gifted"]: "These are both past participles, but there was once the verb to gift, whereas there was never the verb 'to talent.' If Nature did not talent a person the person is not talented." —

**Bradbury, Ray (Douglas) (1920- )**

"You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them." —

**Burns, George (Nathan Birnbaum) (1896-1996)**

"I honestly think it is better to be a failure at something you love than to be a success at something you hate." —

**Dana, Richard Henry, Jr. (1815-1882)**

"If California ever becomes a prosperous country, this bay [San Francisco] will be the center of its prosperity." —

**Didion, Joan (1934- )**

"Quite often you want to tell somebody your dream, your nightmare. Well, nobody wants to hear about someone else's dream, good or bad; nobody wants to walk around with it. The writer is always tricking the reader into listening to the dream." —

**Grey, Zane (1875 - 1939)**

"Recipe For Greatness - To bear up under loss; To fight the bitterness of defeat and the weakness of grief; To be victor over anger; To smile when tears are close; To resist disease and evil men and base instincts; To hate hate and to love love; To go on when it would seem good to die; To look up with unquenchable faith in something ever more about to be. That is what any man can do, and be great." —

**Hammett, (Samuel) Dashiell (1894-1961)**

"I've been as bad an influence on American literature as anyone I can think of." —

"People always say things like, Oh, well, he was suffering so much that he was better off dying. But that's not true. You're always better off living." —

**Harte, Bret (Francis Brett Harte) (1836-1902)**

"But still when the mists of doubt prevail,  
And we lie becalmed by the shores of age,  
We hear from the misty troubled shore  
The voice of the children gone before.  
Drawing the soul to its anchorage." —

"If of all words of tongue and pen,  
The saddest are, 'It might have been,'  
More sad are these we daily see,  
'It is, but it hadn't ought to be.'" —

"The only sure thing about luck is that it will change." —

**Jackson, Helen Hunt (born Helen Maria Fiske) (1830-1885)**

"When Time is spent, Eternity begins." —

**London, (John Griffith) Jack (1876-1916)**

"A good idea, he thought, to sleep off to death. It was like taking an anaesthetic. Freezing was not so bad as people thought. There were lots worse ways to die.... Then the man drowsed off into what seemed to him the most comfortable and satisfying sleep he had ever known." —

"I would rather be ashes than dust! I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dry rot. I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet. The proper function of man is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time." —

**Miller, (Cincinnatus Hiner or Heine) Joaquín (c. 1841-1913)**

"The bravest battle that ever was fought;  
Shall I tell you where and when?  
On the maps of the world you will find it not;  
It was fought by the mothers of men." —

"Death is delightful. Death is dawn,  
The waking from a weary night  
Of fevers unto truth and light." —

"He gained a world; he gave that world  
Its grandest lesson: 'On! sail on!'" —  
*[From the poem "Columbus" about Christopher  
Columbus. This poem provided the motto of the  
California Writers Club, "Sail on!"]*

**Muir, John (1838-1914)**

"The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness." —

"This grand show is eternal. It is always sunrise somewhere; the dew is never all dried at once; a shower is forever falling; vapor ever rising. Eternal sunrise, eternal sunset, eternal dawn and gloaming, on seas and continents and islands, each in its turn, as the round earth rolls." —

"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe." —

**Norris, Kathleen (1879-1966)**

"Changing husbands is only changing troubles." —

"There are men I could spend eternity with, but not this life." —

**Rogers, Will (William Penn Adair Rogers) (1879-1935)**

"All I know is just what I read in the papers." —

"Everything is funny as long as it is happening to somebody else." —

"My forefathers didn't come over on the Mayflower, but they met the boat." —

"Politics has got so expensive that it takes lots of money to even get beat with." —

"There's no trick to being a humorist when you have the whole government working for you." —

"This country has come to feel the same when Congress is in session as when the baby gets hold of a hammer." —

"We can't all be heroes because somebody has to sit on the curb and clap as they go by." —

**Saroyan, William (1908-1981)**

"Try as much as possible to be wholly alive, with all your might, and when you laugh, laugh like hell and when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough." —

"The writer is a spiritual anarchist, as in the depth of his soul every man is. He is discontented with everything and everybody. The writer is everybody's best friend and only true enemy - the good and great enemy. He neither walks with the multitude nor cheers with them. The writer who is a writer is a rebel who never stops." —

"You must give to all who come into your life. Then nothing and no one shall have power to cheat you of anything, for if you give to a thief, he cannot steal from you, and he himself is then no longer a thief. And the more you give, the more you will have to give." —

### **Sinclair, Upton Beall (1878-1968)**

"It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it." —

### **Stegner, Wallace (1909-1993)**

"Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed. We need wilderness preserved – as much of it as still left, and as many kinds – because it was the challenge against which our character as a people was formed. The reminder and the reassurance that it is still there is good for our spiritual health. It is important to us when we are old simply because it is there – important, that is, simply as an idea. " —

"The brook would lose its song if we removed the rocks." —

### **Steinbeck, John (Ernst) (1902-1968)**

"I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man, has no dedication nor any membership in literature." —

"Ideas are like rabbits. You get a couple and learn how to handle them, and pretty soon you have a dozen." —

"Man, unlike any other thing organic or inorganic in the universe, grows beyond his work, walks up the stairs of his concepts, emerges ahead of his accomplishments." —

"The profession of book writing makes horse racing seem like a solid, stable business." —

"A sad soul can kill you quicker, far quicker, than a germ." —

### **Tan, Amy (1952- )**

"It's a luxury being a writer, because all you ever think about is life." —

"Writing is an extreme privilege but it's also a gift. It's a gift to yourself and it's a gift of giving a story to someone." —

## **Twain, Mark (Samuel Langhorne Clemens) (1835-1910)**

"*Classic.* 'A book which people praise and don't read.'" —

"Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence in society." —

"Good breeding consists in concealing how much we think of ourselves & how little we think of the other person." —

"Have a place for everything & keep the thing somewhere else. This not advice, it is merely custom." —

"I was gratified to be able to answer promptly, and I did. I said I didn't know." —

"October. This is one of the peculiarly dangerous months to speculate in stocks in. The others are July, January, September, April, November, May, March, June, December, August, and February." —

"The difference between the *almost*-right word & the *right* word is really a large matter – 'tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning." —

"There is no sadder sight than a young pessimist, except an old optimist." —

"We have not the reverent feeling for the rainbow that a savage has, because we know how it is made. We have lost as much as we gained by prying into that matter." —

## **Warren, Earl (14<sup>th</sup> Chief Justice of the United States) (1891-1974)**

"When an individual is taken into custody or otherwise deprived of his freedom by the authorities in any significant way and is subjected to questioning.... He must be warned prior to any questioning that he has the right to remain silent, that anything he says can be used against him in a court of law, that he has the right to the presence of an attorney, and that, if he cannot afford an attorney one will be appointed for him prior to any questioning, if he so desires." —

[From *Miranda v. Arizona*, 384 U.S. 436 [1966]]