

America, the Beautiful is an American patriotic song. The text was written by Katharine Lee Bates (1859-1929), who was a prolific American writer, college professor, scholar and social activist. She mentored many young poets, (including Robert Frost) and helped establish American literature as a field for college study, including by writing a textbook on it (she was the first woman to do so).

Bates originally wrote the words as a poem titled "Pikes Peak." In 1893, she took a train trip from Massachusetts to Colorado. She was inspired by several of the sights she saw on the trip, including the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, an event that was intended to express the promise of the future, included pavilions of 46 countries, and featured the vast architectural representation of a city comprising gleaming alabaster buildings. Other images that found their way into her poem came from wheat fields and the view of the plains from atop Pikes Peak, where she began to write the poem. The poem was first published in 1895 in *The Congregationalist* under the title "America" to commemorate July 4th, and was different from the text now sung now in the song (see below).

By 1900, at least 75 different melodies had been composed to accompany the poem. The setting composed by Samuel A. Ward (1848-1903), a church organist and choirmaster at Grace Episcopal Church in Newark, New Jersey, was considered the best and is still the popular tune today. He composed the tune (Materna) in 1882 for the hymn "O Mother dear, Jerusalem," although it was not published until 1892. The tune came to Ward when he was on a ferryboat trip from Coney Island back to his home in New York City on a summer day. Ward's music combined with Bates's poem was first published in 1910 and titled "America, the Beautiful." Ward died in 1903, not knowing the stature his music would attain. The song's popularity was well established by the time Bates died in 1929, however. Bates and Ward never met.

At various times since it was written, there have been efforts to give "America, the Beautiful" status as a national hymn or national anthem equal to or in place of "The Star-Spangled Banner," and in fact it was being considered for the national anthem before 1931. Below may be seen the two versions of the text.

### **Pikes Peak (1893)**

O beautiful for halcyon skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the enameled plain!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee,  
Till souls wax fair as earth and air  
And music-hearted sea!

O beautiful for pilgrim feet  
Whose stern, impassioned stress  
A thoroughfare for freedom beat  
Across the wilderness!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee  
Till paths be wrought through wilds of thought  
By pilgrim foot and knee!

O beautiful for glory-tale  
Of liberating strife,  
When once or twice, for man's avail,  
Men lavished precious life!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee  
Till selfish gain no longer stain,  
The banner of the free!

O beautiful for patriot dream  
That sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam  
Undimmed by human tears!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee  
Till nobler men keep once again  
Thy whiter jubilee!

**1910 Version**

O beautiful for spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee  
And crown thy good with brotherhood\*  
From sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for pilgrim feet,  
Whose stern, impassioned stress  
A thoroughfare for freedom beat  
Across the wilderness!  
America! America!  
God mend thine every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self-control,  
Thy liberty in law!

O beautiful for heroes proved  
In liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country loved  
And mercy more than life!  
America! America!  
May God thy gold refine,  
Till all success be nobleness,

And every gain divine!

O beautiful for patriot dream  
That sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam  
Undimmed by human tears!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!

\*feel free to make substitutions here: sisterhood, neighborhood, where we have stood, with yet more good

You can find more information in Lynn Sherr's book *America the Beautiful* and more about Katharine Bates in Melinda M. Ponder's book *Katharine Lee Bates: From Seat to Shining Sea*.

#### Editions

There is a good edition at CPDL that is for SATB with a piano reduction that could be used for SATB or unison. This is free and in the public domain and is the one linked at azacda.org  
[http://www1.cpd.org/wiki/images/e/ee/America\\_The\\_Beautiful.pdf](http://www1.cpd.org/wiki/images/e/ee/America_The_Beautiful.pdf)

You can also find many other arrangements for different tastes for purchase and also:  
SATB, arr. Ashley Etzkom  
[http://www1.cpd.org/wiki/images/1/1e/5\\_America%2C\\_the\\_Beautiful.pdf](http://www1.cpd.org/wiki/images/1/1e/5_America%2C_the_Beautiful.pdf)

#### IMSLP

Treble version with string orchestra arr. Herbert Straus Gardner

[https://imslp.simssa.ca/files/imglnks/usimg/1/15/IMSLP526906-PMLP88709-America\\_The\\_Beautiful-score\\_pdf.pdf](https://imslp.simssa.ca/files/imglnks/usimg/1/15/IMSLP526906-PMLP88709-America_The_Beautiful-score_pdf.pdf)

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TTBB version arr. Sean Salamon

[https://imslp.simssa.ca/files/imglnks/usimg/3/3a/IMSLP20854-PMLP48436-IMSLP\\_score.pdf](https://imslp.simssa.ca/files/imglnks/usimg/3/3a/IMSLP20854-PMLP48436-IMSLP_score.pdf)