

My life closed twice before its close;
It yet remains to see
If Immortality unveil
A third event to me,
So huge, so hopeless to conceive,
As these that twice befell.
Parting is all we know of heaven,
And all we need of hell.

1. What metaphor does the speaker use? What does the metaphor mean?
2. What are the 2 events that the speaker mentions?
3. What is the theme of the poem? Provide evidence to support your claims
4. What two words indicate a metaphor of vision?
5. What literary device is used in the last two lines of the poem? How does the device contribute to the meaning of the poem?
6. What does this literary device mean/ how does it contribute to our understanding of the poem's theme?
7. Is there any comfort in this poem? Explain your reasoning.

I heard a fly buzz when I died;
The stillness round my form
Was like the stillness in the air
Between the heavens of storm.

The eyes beside had wrung them dry,
And breaths were gathering sure
For that last onset, when the king
Be witnessed in his power.

I willed my keepsakes, signed away
What portion of me I
Could make assignable,-and then
There interposed a fly,

With blue, uncertain, stumbling buzz,
Between the light and me;
And then the windows failed, and then
I could not see to see.

1. How is death depicted in this poem?
2. What is repeated 3 times in the poem? What is the significance of this reference?
3. How does the description of the room impact the mood of the poem?
4. What is the speaker's tone? Explain your reasoning.
5. Identify the oxymoron. What does it mean?
6. Who is the "king"?
7. What is ironic about the fly's appearance? How does this irony impact our understanding of the poem?
8. There are multiple interpretations of the fly. The fly may stand for Beelzebub, who is also known as lord of the flies. Sometimes Beelzebub is used as another name for Satan; sometimes it refers to any devil; in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Beelzebub is Satan's chief lieutenant in hell. If the King whom the observers and/or the speaker is waiting for turns out to be the devil, is there still irony? How is the meaning of the poem affected by this reading? For example, does the poem become more cheerful? What would Dickinson be saying about eternity? Can the poem support more than one of these interpretations of the fly?
9. What is the effect of the fly being the only sign of life ("buzz") at the end of the poem? To extend this question, is it significant that the only sign of vitality and aliveness in the *entire poem* is the fly?
10. What is surprising about the first line in this poem?

The soul selects her own society,
Then shuts the door;
On her divine majority
Obtrude no more.

Unmoved, she notes the chariot's pausing
At her low gate;
Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling
Upon her mat.

I've known her from an ample nation
Choose one;
Then close the valves of her attention
Like stone.

1. What is the topic of this poem? Try to think of two possible topics. Provide evidence to support your claim.
2. What are the two actions in the poem?
3. Is there a difference in her presentation of these two actions? Does she emphasize selecting the friend more than rejecting all others, or is the act of excluding emphasized?
4. What do you notice about the organization of this poem?

Stanza 1

5. In lines 1 and 2, what sound is repeated? Is she emphasizing key words with this alliteration?
6. Dickinson has the "soul" doing the choosing. What aspects or part of the human being does "soul" represent?
7. Does using "soul" give a high or a low value to the way this individual selects friends? Does she have admirably high standards or is she despicably vain and insensitive?
8. What is the meaning of divine majority? Think about the different definitions of these words. *Majority* has several meanings: (1) more than half, (2) the age of legal adulthood, no longer a minor, (3) the military rank of major, (4) superiority (an obsolete meaning today). Which definition or definitions are meant here? Think about how each one fits into the meaning of the poem and how it adds to the effect of the poem and choose. It is possible, in a poem, for all these meanings to be intended.
9. What kind of a gesture is shutting the door? Is it, for example, an action that leaves open the possibility of change, or is it a final action?
10. What are the connotations of the word "obtrude"?

Stanza 2

11. Which words indicate status? What is the meaning of these references?

12. Describe what is happening in line 3 – be careful, Dickinson omits a subject and verb, which can confuse readers.

Stanza 3

13. What is depicted in the third stanza? Provide words and phrases to support your claims.

14. What is like stone

15. What qualities do we associate with stone?

16. Is it a coincidence that the poem ends with "stone" or is it appropriate? Openings and closings get more attention than or stand out from the rest of a text because of their position.

17. What do you notice about the meter and line length? What is the impact of these changes?

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labor, and my leisure too,
For his civility.

We passed the school, where children
strove
At recess, in the ring;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.

Or rather, he passed us;
The dews grew quivering and chill,
For only gossamer my gown,
My tippet only tulle.

We paused before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice but a mound.

Since then 'tis centuries, and yet each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

Dickinson left several versions of this poem. Above is the version used by Thomas H. Johnson in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, because it is more effective than the one in your textbook. The early editors of Dickinson's poems dropped the fourth stanza of this poem, a practice which the editors of your textbook have, unfortunately, followed. I have included the deleted stanza because it strengthens the poem.

1. What literary device is used in the first stanza? Hint: in relation to death
2. What words are used to describe Death? What are his actions? What do these descriptions reveal about death?
3. How is the narrator dressed? What does her apparel reveal about her and the experience?
4. What does the drive symbolize? Provide key words and phrases to support your claims.
5. What is the significance of the children in the poem? What do they represent?
6. Identify the repetition in stanzas 3 and 4. What impact does this repetition have on the poem?

7. How is the grave described? What effect does this description have on the poem? What does the description reveal to the reader?
8. In the final stanza, the speaker has moved into death; the language becomes abstract; in the previous stanzas the imagery was concrete and specific. What is Dickinson saying about death or her knowledge of death with this change?
9. Where does the verb tense change? Why does she change tenses?