

Name: _____ Class: _____

"Hope" is the thing with feathers - (254)

By Emily Dickinson
1891

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was an American poet who lived a mostly introverted, secluded life. She wrote over 1,800 poems — many of which deal with themes of death and immortality — in her seclusion. The following poem was first published in 1891 and discusses the nature of hope. As you read, take notes on Dickinson's symbol of hope and the figurative language used to describe it.

- [1] "Hope" is the thing with feathers —
That perches in the soul —
And sings the tune without the words —
And never stops — at all —
- [5] And sweetest — in the Gale¹ — is heard —
And sore² must be the storm —
That could abash³ the little Bird
That kept so many warm —
- I've heard it in the chilliest land —
[10] And on the strangest Sea —
Yet — never — in Extremity,⁴
It asked a crumb — of Me.



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1. **Gale (noun):** strong wind
2. In this case, "sore" refers to the severity or terribleness of this hypothetical storm.
3. **Abash (verb):** to destroy the self-confidence of; to bewilder or embarrass
4. **Extremity (noun):** the furthest limit; or the extreme degree or nature of something

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes a central theme of the poem?
 - A. Love and family help people get through tough times.
 - B. Nature is the natural opponent of people.
 - C. Overcoming obstacles requires great hope, strength, and resilience.
 - D. One can always rely on hope to help overcome obstacles.

2. PART B: Which of the of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "'Hope' is the thing with feathers" (Line 1)
 - B. "That perches in the soul — / ... And never stops — at all" (Lines 2-4)
 - C. "sore must be the storm — / That could abash" (Lines 6-7)
 - D. "I've heard it in the chilliest land — / And on the strangest Sea — " (Lines 9-10)

3. PART A: What does the storm most likely represent?
 - A. Hardship
 - B. Death
 - C. Sadness
 - D. Danger

4. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "'Hope' is the thing with feathers" (Line 1)
 - B. "sings the tune without the words" (Line 3)
 - C. "abash the little Bird" (Line 7)
 - D. "the strangest Sea" (Line 10)

5. What does the last stanza suggest about the speaker's point of view regarding hope?
 - A. The speaker has experienced some troubled times but is now in a much better place.
 - B. The speaker thinks of hope as the only source of comfort in his/her life, even more than food (i.e. the "crumb").
 - C. The speaker thinks hope is helpful, but only to a certain point.
 - D. The speaker, having experienced adversity, regards hope in a positive light, as it never asked anything of him/her.

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the context of this poem, how do people overcome adversity? Use evidence from this poem, your own experience, and other literature or art in your answer.
2. How do the descriptions of nature contribute to the meaning of the poem? Is the comparison of hope to a bird effective? Why or why not?