

American Literature

Emily Dickinson Discussion Questions

#986

1. What thing of nature is Dickinson paying details attention to in this poem?
2. Point out one simile and one metaphor in this poem.
3. Who is the persona narrating this poem?
4. What attitude does the poet express toward nature in the last two stanzas?

#76

1. In what way are the first two lines of this poem similar to what Ishmael says in the first chapter of *Moby Dick*?
2. What is the basic contrast that Dickinson sets up within this poem?
3. In this poem Dickinson is giving a description of “exultation, a divine intoxication.” What human experience does she apply this “exultation” to? (Pay attention to lines 4 and 8.)

#258

1. In this poem Dickinson describes the mood of “despair” by comparing it in detail to a certain ordinary experience in “nature?” What is this experience?
2. Point out and explain the words or images that relate this natural experience to despair.
3. Why does she call despair (as well as this particular experience of nature) something that gives us a “heavenly hurt”?”

#449

1. The basic device used in this poem is that of a dialogue between two persons. Who are they? Where does the dialogue take place?
2. What attitude do these two persons have to each other? What conclusion do they come to?
3. If anyone in the group remembers the famous poem by John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” he/she should explain how this poem by Dickinson is related to the Keats poem.

#465

1. This is one of Dickinson’s great poems in which she imagines her own death. It has been said that the poem contains tremendous irony through the juxtaposition of opposites. Try to point out at least two examples of such

juxtaposition, more if possible.

2. Who is the “King” in line 7? What kind of experience of death do the poet and those around her expect in stanza 2?
3. Actually, what is her experience of death, as it is described in stanza 4?

#712

1. This is also considered one of Dickinson’s greatest poems about death, in which she compares death to a suitor or bridegroom come to get her. What is the meaning of the first two lines? Is there any irony involved?
2. Who is their chaperon in the carriage? What significance does this have?
3. What is the response of the poet to the coming of death (stanza 2)?
4. What human activities do they ride past in stanza 3? What do these activities symbolize?
5. What time of the day is it in stanza 4? Why is this fitting?
6. The poet describes how she is dressed in line 15 and 16. What does her dress suggest? How is her apparel ironic and yet fitting?
7. What is the “house” in which they stop? What clues are there in stanza 5 to make clear what the “house” is?
8. What does the poet say about the nature of death in the last stanza?

#214

1. What is the individual’s relationship with Nature in this poem (this idea is typical of Dickinson’s Nature poems). How is Dickinson’s idea similar to Emerson’s concept of man’s relation to Nature?
2. What is the basic image which Dickinson uses as a shock device? Point out all the words or phrases that develop this image throughout the poem (thus giving the poem a unity).
3. What is the attitude toward poetry which Dickinson is expressing here?