**Poem: Hope Is the Thing with Feathers (1861)**

**Author: Emily Dickinson**

**Literary Lesson: Figurative language**

**Emily Dickinson**(December 10, 1830 – May 15, 1886)lived much of her life in reclusive isolation. Dickinson was born into a prominent family with strong ties to its community. Evidence suggests that Dickinson lived much of her life in isolation. Considered an eccentric by locals, she developed a penchant for white clothing and was known for her reluctance to greet guests or, later in life, to even leave her bedroom. Dickinson never married, and most friendships between her and others depended entirely upon correspondence.



Although Dickinson's acquaintances were likely aware of her writing, it was not until after her death in 1886—when Lavinia, Dickinson's younger sister, discovered her cache of poems—that the breadth of her work became public. A complete, and mostly unaltered, collection of her poetry became available for the first time when scholar Thomas H. Johnson published *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* in 1955.

While Dickinson was a prolific private poet, fewer than a dozen of her nearly 1,800 poems were published during her lifetime. The work that was published during her lifetime was usually altered significantly by the publishers to fit the conventional poetic rules of the time. Her poems are unique for the era in which she wrote; they contain short lines, typically lack titles, and often use slant rhyme as well as unconventional capitalization and punctuation.The extensive use of dashes and unconventional capitalization in Dickinson's manuscripts, and the idiosyncratic vocabulary and imagery, combine to create a body of work that is far more various in its styles and forms than is commonly supposed.Dickinson avoids pentameter, opting more generally for trimeter, tetrameter and, less often, dimeter. Sometimes her use of these meters is regular, but oftentimes it is irregular. Though Dickinson often uses perfect rhymes (ABCB) for lines two and four, she also makes frequent use of slant rhyme. Many of her poems deal with themes of death and immortality, two recurring topics in letters to her friends. Dickinson's poetry frequently uses humor, puns, irony and satire.

Emily Dickinson is now considered a powerful and persistent figure in American culture.Although much of the early reception concentrated on Dickinson's eccentric and secluded nature, she has become widely acknowledged as an innovative, proto-modernist poet.

(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emily\_Dickinson)

**Hope Is The Thing With Feathers**

“Hope” is the thing with feathers −

That perches in the soul −

And sings the tune without the words −

And never stops − at all −

And sweetest − in the Gale − is heard−

And sore must be the storm−

That could abash the little Bird

That kept so many warm −

I’ve heard it in the chillest land −

And on the strangest Sea −

Yet − never − in Extremity,

It asked a crumb − of Me.

**B. AFTER READING**

**I. Vocabulary**

1. **A gale** in this poem is a

A. cloud B. desert

C. strong wind D. little whale

2. **Sore** in this poem means

A. fun B. adverse

C. painful D. apologetic

3. **Abash** means to

A. make uneasy B. increase

C. embarrass D. hit with a hammer

4. **Extremity** in this poem means

A. an arm/ a leg B. a far-away place

C. severe hardship D. salvation

5. **A crumb** means

A. evidence of decay B. a piece of food

C. a small amount D. a great cartoonist

**II. Literary Lesson: Figurative language**

Any language which deviates from literal language so as to furnish novel effects or fresh insights into the subject being discussed is called figurative language. The most common figures of speech are simile, metaphor, personification and hyperbole.

1. What technique does the author use to describe “Hope”?

1. Alliteration B. Extended metaphor

C. Simile D. Personification

2. What is the extended metaphor in this poem?

A.Feathers are compared to a bird B. Hope is compared to a bird

C. A tune is compared to the soul D. A storm is a complication

3. The poet uses the word “gale” and “storm” as metaphors. What might these words represent?

1. Bad weather B. Pleasant time

C. Hardship D. Time of success and growth

4. Hope is important and helpful in time of pain, sorrow or difficulty. Which lines from the poem best support this statement?

1. Lines 1-2 B. Lines 3-4

C. Lines 5-8 D. Lines 11-12

5. The poet says hope “sings the tunes without the words”. Why might the poet have written that the tune has no words?

1. To emphasize that hope does not need putting into words to be felt
2. To point out that it is very difficult for people to express whether they feel hopeful or not
3. To suggest that people are usually unable to understand the feeling of hope
4. To indicate that people who are always hopeful are also often forgetful

6. What does the word “abash” most nearly mean, based on the poem?

1. To confuse B. To praise

C. To support D. To silence

7. What is the theme of the poem?

1. People need to work hard in order to maintain hope at all times.
2. Hope can survive through even the toughest times.
3. Hope is able to keep people warm even in the coldest, stormiest lands.
4. Without hope, people would be much more sensible and realistic.

(Source: <https://quizizz.com/admin/quiz/580765a524e9e1f554ecdf99/hope-is-the-thing-with-feathers-by-emily-dickinson>)

**IV. Questions for analysis**

1. Why do you think Dickinson chose a bird to represent hope?

Hope 🡺 Bird

Abstract 🡺 Concrete

What characteristics do they share?

1. How important is the idea of suffering to this poem? Do you need it in order to have hope? How might the speaker answer that question?