

Poem #9

“Hope” by Emily Dickinson

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 chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.



Emily Dickinson wrote over 1,800 poems during her life, but fewer than twelve of them were published before she died. This poem's most famous lines are in the first stanza that compares hope to a bird. Dickinson's rhyme (called slant rhyme) isn't traditional – for example, in lines two and four that end in *soul* and *all*. Sometimes this is called “near rhyme” or “half rhyme.”

Her meter is also interesting, and it enables most of her poems – including this one – to be sung to the tune of the *Gilligan's Island* theme song and *Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem*. Go ahead; try it.

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Taking it apart

"Hope" by Emily Dickinson

This poem uses an extended metaphor to compare hope to a bird inside oneself that never stops singing its tune.

Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul,

A gale is a storm, and that is when the bird's song is sweetest.

And sings the tune--without the words,

And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;

"Sore" here means "harsh" or "terrible."

And sore must be the storm

"Abash" is "shame."

That could abash the little bird

That kept so many warm.

Here, the bird of hope keeps people warm, not even just the person who has it.

I've heard it in the chillest land,

And on the strangest sea;

This last stanza says that even though the bird of hope has sung its song in the hardest of times and never asked for even a crumb of payment.

Yet, never, in extremity,

It asked a crumb of me.



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Memorizing it

Try singing it to one of the tunes mentioned above for practice. Next, associate a strong image with each stanza.

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And never stops at all,



And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
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I've heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.





Memorizing it

Now that you've sung it through a few times and associated a strong visual image with each stanza, try reciting the poem using just the first letters of the words.

“Hope” by Emily Dickinson

H__ i__ t__ t__ w__ f__
T__ p__ i__ t__ s__,
A__ s__ t__ t__—w__ t__ w__,
A__ n__ s__ a__ a__,

A__ s__ i__ t__ g__ i__ h__;
A__ s__ m__ b__ t__ s__
T__ c__ a__ t__ l__ b__
T__ k__ s__ m__ w__.

I__ h__ i__ i__ t__ c__ l__,
A__ o__ t__ s__ s__;
Y__, n__, i__ e__,
I__ a__ a c__ o__ m__.