

English Sample Answers

The Poetry of Emily Dickinson

Content

This document contains notes and sample answers I made during my study of Emily Dickinson for the LC 2024.

The first part of the document contains my personal responses (in-depth analysis) of each of the 6 poems that I studied.

The second part contains H1 sample answers to 2 official SEC exam questions. **This includes my response to the 2024 Q, for which I got 96%, officially corrected by the SEC.**

Personal responses to the poems:

- “Hope” is the thing with feathers
- I felt a Funeral, in my Brain
- There’s a certain Slant of light
- I Heard a fly buzz - when I died
- A Bird came down the Walk
- After great pain, a formal feeling comes

H1 answer to following questions:

- LC 2024 (96% - **official result corrected by SEC**)
- LC 2022 (96% - corrected by my teacher)

Quick Disclaimer:

These notes include my personal in-depth analysis of the poems I studied, as well as sample answers from my LC 2024 prep (7 H1s, 625 points).

The answers were officially or teacher-corrected, while the poems’ analysis are based on my own learning. Not all students may study the same poems. Use this document as a guide, not templates, and always rely on your own preparation.

Personal Response to the different poems:

What is a personal response?

A personal response is your own analysis of a poem, which includes looking at the language, techniques, and emotions, while also engaging with it in a meaningful way.

In my responses, I explore the key techniques and ideas I found important, with the goal of understanding the poem more deeply and making exam answers easier to write. I've also structured each response with a clear beginning, middle, and end, just like an LC essay.

These responses are a great tool for learning the poems. I'd recommend reading through them first, and then trying to write your own personal responses as practice.

Why bother?

What I've learnt is that the key to getting a H1 in English is showing *your own voice*.

Examiners want to see your opinions and how you personally engage with the text.

Anyone can pick apart a quote. **What really matters is explaining why it's significant and how it made you feel.** That's the difference between a standard answer and a H1 answer.

In the following answers, I have highlighted some key parts to make skimming easier as well!

Personal response to “Hope” is the thing with feathers’

The highly thought-provoking poem, 'Hope is the thing with feathers,' written by the enigmatic poet, Emily Dickinson, is perhaps her most renowned piece. This intricately crafted masterpiece explores the theme of hope in an unconventional manner, true with her style of poetry. In only three stanzas, the readers are left flabbergasted with the deep and implicit meanings held in the poem. 'Hope is the thing with feathers,' is a major contrast to Dickinson's sombre poetry style, truly depicting her adroitness and vast repertoire of writing techniques.

"Hope is the thing with feathers," an omnipresent beginning to the poem, establishing the main idea of the piece with a bold emphasis. This smart metaphorical comparison, stating that hope is “the thing with feathers” really accentuates the meaning, making Dickinson's deep thoughts conspicuous. This extended metaphor shapes the rest of the poem. In the latter half of this long stanza, there is prominent usage of aural imagery, as seen in “sings the tune without the words”. This is an effective language technique. It effectively gives the image of a beautiful sound, calming the senses. The anaphora of “And” has quite the onomatopoeic effect, highlighting the melody of the metaphorical, mystical, feathery creature. The first stanza inaugurates the explicit theme of ‘hope’, while intriguing the readers with unusual imagery and metaphors.

Pathetic Fallacy is developed in the second stanza, a notable attribute of Dickinson's poetry. The idea of ‘hope’ is expressed as “sweetest-in the Gale-is heard”. This is a strong image and concept, evoking emotions in the readers. The word "Gale" is a descriptive word, representing harsh conditions. The concept that "hope" may be the strongest in times of despair, in my opinion, is an extremely emotionally touching thought. The sibilance in "sore storm," further creates an immersive experience for the readers, creating a dark atmosphere. The protagonist of the poem

sweeps in again, returning the poem to a positive beat — 'with that kept so many warm'. This creates a heart-warming environment, expressing the power of 'hope'.

The third stanza is a summation of the entire ideology of this piece of art. Dickinson elucidates her own experience with this "little bird," highlighting the significance of hope in her life. This is a fantastic technique employed, as it creates a personal connection with the readers. "I've heard it in the chilliest land, on the strangest sea," a depiction of 'hope' doing its magic even in times of deep anguish. There is lucid nautical imagery, emphasising the 'dark' and 'unknown' territory. The beat and tempo of the poem is considerably slowed down, letting the implicit meanings sink in. This, in my opinion, makes the poem more personal. The readers can empathise with the everlasting feeling of this poem. "Yet- never - in Extremity," further highlights the mighty metaphorical bird. The word 'never' has an emphatic effect, stating the whole poem's view firmly upon the readers. This creates a sense of certainty. The poem ends on a high, with "asked a crumb - of me", portraying the unconditional nature of this eternal feeling.

This poem is a didactic poem that explores the abstract feeling of 'hope' in all its might. Emily Dickinson incorporates a multitude of different language techniques, in an attempt to delineate such a complex feeling, in merely three stanzas. Her brilliance is that she successfully conveyed the main message of the poem, while emotionally involving the reader to the maximum capacity. This brilliant poem is a true reinforcement of Dickinson's undisputed calibre. The different symbols, and images, and the marvelous extended metaphor effectively developed the theme, while conveying the true, implicit meanings of the poem.

Personal response to 'I felt a funeral in my brain'

In this poem, Dickinson explores complex notions and themes with a view to brevity. The prominent theme of 'life and death,' is magnificently depicted throughout the poem, with a jittery and tense tone adding to the intense atmosphere. Dickinson ponders over difficult ideas like the afterlife, immersing herself in her own funeral.

The striking use of onomatopoeia in this poem permeates in the first quatrain, seen in "treading - treading". The repetition of this effect creates a sense of anxiety, creating a tense atmosphere. There is a prevailing aural imagery, made possible by the rhythmic qualities. A "Service, like a Drum" entails a similar effect, really painting a vivid image of the funeral. The descriptive attributes of the first two quatrains, supplemented by the introspective tones of anxiety, develops the theme as the readers can sense Dickinson's profound fear regarding the concept of death.

The account of the funeral continues in the following quatrains, further portraying Dickinson's intense emotions. The phrase "And creak across my Soul" highlights the poet's anxiety. The word "Creak" has an onomatopoeic effect, giving the impression of a loud and unsettling sound. The prominent usage of enjambment in this stanza slows down the beat and rhythm, allowing the readers to comprehensively visualise her funeral.

"As all the Heavens were a Bell" is an extremely effective line, as the reference to God really heightens the intensity of emotions. This metaphorical comparison gives a sense of a deafening sound. This gives the impression that Dickinson doesn't have control over the predicament of death. This image is supplemented by some strange nuances, further accentuating the feelings of immense 'shock' and uncertainty. The entire fourth quatrain explores Dickinson's feeling of trepidation over the

concept of death. It's clear that the uncertainty of death and the afterlife haunts her most.

Dickinson reaches a point of mental breakdown in the final stanza, with all of her emotions, unleashing havoc in her brain. "And I dropped down, and down," gives a sense of uncontrollable falling, creating a pause in the poem. This showcases her feelings of eternal pain. The alliteration of 'd' creates an anxious and tense atmosphere. In this stanza, the anaphora of "and" complemented by an abrupt syntax, relates back to the feeling of 'sense was breaking through'. Dickinson is unable to cope with these complex emotions. The cliff-hanger ending, "finished knowing - then" highlights the uncertainty over afterlife. This conclusion perfectly accounts for all of Dickinson's unanswered questions. Answers she might never unearth.

Without a shadow of a doubt, this is Dickinson's most formidable and career-defining poem. She explored the complexity of 'death' in a very simplistic manner, really allowing the readers to fully grasp these notions.