



Name: _____ Class: _____

I'm Happiest When Most Away

By Emily Brontë
1838

Emily Brontë (1818-1848) was an English poet and author best known for her novel Wuthering Heights. Brontë had shy, solitary nature and made few friends outside of her family. As you read, take notes on how the speaker views herself and the world around her.

- [1] I'm happiest when most away
I can bear my soul from its home of clay
On a windy night when the moon is bright
And the eye can wander through worlds of light
—
- [5] When I am not and none beside —
Nor earth nor sea nor cloudless sky —
But only spirit wandering wide
Through infinite immensity.



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"I'm Happiest When Most Away" by Emily Brontë (1838) is in the public domain.

Text-Dependent Questions

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

1. PART A: Which of the following statements best express a theme in the poem?
 - A. Daydreaming is a nice escape from one's problems, but it is not a permanent solution.
 - B. One's soul can only truly be at peace after it has left one's body in death.
 - C. People should embrace being alone and the peace it can bring.
 - D. People shouldn't feel ashamed for being different, as there are many ways of being happy.

2. PART B: Which of the following phrases best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "I'm happiest when most away / I can bear my soul from its home of clay" (Lines 1-2)
 - B. "On a windy night when the moon is bright / And the eye can wander through worlds of light — " (Lines 3-4)
 - C. "When I am not and none beside — / Nor earth nor sea nor cloudless sky — " (Lines 5-6)
 - D. "But only spirit wandering wide / Through infinite immensity" (Lines 7-8)

3. What does the phrase "home of clay" mean as used in line 2?
 - A. The phrase suggests that the speaker feels trapped while indoors and would prefer to be outside.
 - B. The phrase refers to a society that restricts the speaker's freedoms because of her gender.
 - C. The phrase suggests that the speaker feels limited by boring reality and so she uses her studies as a means of escape.
 - D. The phrase refers to the speaker's body as she imagines herself free of her body's physical confinement.

4. How does the poet's use of dashes in lines 4-6 contribute to the meaning of the poem?
 - A. The dashes suggest contemplative pauses that reflect how the speaker's thoughts expand as her soul expands "away" into the universe.
 - B. The dashes suggest that everything in the universe is connected, just as the lines are connected by the dashes.
 - C. The dashes suggest that the universe is actually empty and meaningless, just as the dashes are silent and represent nothing.
 - D. The dashes suggest that the speaker can only speak in short phrases because she is dying, and the dashes represent her labored breathing.

5. How does the speaker view herself and how she interacts with the world in the poem? Cite evidence from the poem in your answer.

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. Literacy critics have interpreted "I'm Happiest When Most Away" as a poem about death. Because Brontë relies mostly on figurative language in this poem, the theme is left open to debate. Do you agree that the poem is about death? Look carefully at the author's word choice before you make your case.
2. In the context of this poem, how do we achieve happiness? Do you agree with the speaker's form of happiness? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. In the context of this poem, what does it mean to feel alone? Do you think solitude is always a bad thing? Why or why not? How does the speaker feel about being alone? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.