We Grow Accustomed to the Dark
By Emily Dickinson
C. 1862

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was an American poet who lived a mostly introverted, secluded life, maintaining friendships through written letters. She wrote over 1800 poems in her seclusion, most of which were published after her death. As you read, take notes on the meaning of “darkness” throughout the poem.

[1] We grow accustomed to the Dark –
When light is put away –
As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp
To witness her Goodbye –

For newness of the night –
Then – fit our Vision to the Dark –
And meet the Road – erect –

And so of larger – Darknesses –

[10] Those Evenings of the Brain –
When not a Moon disclose a sign –
Or Star – come out – within –

The Bravest – grope a little –
And sometimes hit a Tree

But as they learn to see –

Either the Darkness alters –
Or something in the sight
Adjusts itself to Midnight –

[20] And Life steps almost straight.

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Text-Dependent Questions

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

1. Which of the following best describe the speaker’s point of view?
   A. The speaker’s point of view is that of the neighbor walking at night.
   B. The speaker’s point of view is that of a group of people discussing darkness and death.
   C. The speaker’s point of view is that of someone participating in the events described in the poem.
   D. The speaker’s point of view is that of a removed or distant narrator who speaks for humanity.

2. How does the word choice in stanzas 4-5 affect the tone of the poem?
   A. The words “learn” and “Adjusts” shift the tone from uncertain to hopeful as the speaker affirms the ability for people to withstand difficulty.
   B. The phrase “hit a tree” makes the tone even more serious and tragic as the speaker considers the pain that darkness causes.
   C. The phrase “learn to see” shifts the tone from gloomy to more joyful when the speaker realizes that darkness initiates a learning process.
   D. The words “Either” and “alters” make the tone even more mysterious as the speaker reveals the disorienting effect that darkness can have.

3. Which statement best expresses a theme in the poem?
   A. A strong support system is necessary to overcome adversity.
   B. Gaining confidence with a new task requires independence and attention to detail.
   C. It takes time and courage to endure unfamiliar circumstances.
   D. Friends can inspire us to embrace the mystery of the unknown.

4. How does the author use symbolism to develop the theme of the poem? Cite evidence from the text in your answer.
5. How does the poem's stylistic form (i.e. punctuation and capitalization) contribute to its meaning?
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. Dickinson is known for her unconventional use of capitalization. As you read the poem again, make notes about Dickinson’s use of capitalization. What patterns do you notice? How does her capitalization help you understand the poem?

2. Re-read your answer to Question 2. What is your strongest argument for choosing the answer you did? Be prepared to make a case for your answer in a class debate.

3. Can a poem have multiple interpretations? Explain your answer.