



## I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –

Emily Dickinson  
Poem 465

*Emily Dickinson took part at many deathbed vigils and these experiences are reflected in her poems about death, like the one below.*

- I heard a Fly buzz<sup>1</sup> – when I died –  
 The Stillness in the Room  
 Was like the Stillness in the Air –  
 Between the Heaves of Storm –
- 5 The Eyes around – had wrung them dry<sup>2</sup>  
 And Breaths were gathering firm<sup>3</sup>  
 For the last Onset – when the King  
 Be witnessed – in the Room –
- 10 I willed my Keepsakes<sup>4</sup> – signed away  
 What portion of me be  
 Assignable – and then it was  
 There interposed a Fly –
- 15 With Blue – uncertain stumbling Buzz –  
 Between the light – and me –  
 And then the Windows failed<sup>5</sup> – and then  
 I could not see to see –

- 1 Fly buzz. Mosca ronzare.  
 2 had ... dry. Avevano esaurito le lacrime.  
 3 Breaths ... firm. Trattenevano il respiro.  
 4 I ... Keepsakes. Lasciai i miei ricordi.  
 5 failed. Vennero meno.

### LITERARY COMPETENCE

#### > VOCABULARY

#### 1 READ the poem and match the highlighted words with their meaning.

- 1 upward motions .....  
 2 gave in, surrendered .....  
 3 confused .....  
 4 assault .....  
 5 silence, absence of motion .....

#### > COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

#### 2 READ the poem again and answer the following questions.

- 1 Who is speaking?  
 2 What moment does the poem explore?  
 3 What unexpected feature dominates this moment?  
 4 What is the room like?  
 5 How do people behave? What are they waiting for?  
 6 What has the speaker tidied up before dying?  
 7 What is the dying person deprived of at the end?



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➤ COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

- 3 ANALYSE** the rhyme scheme of the poem. What conclusions can you draw?
- 4 FOCUS** on the punctuation. What is unusual about it? How does the syntax suggest that the moment of death has come in the last stanza?
- 5 EXPLAIN** the symbol of the fly. What effect is created by its presence in such a solemn moment?
- 6 SAY** what the real theme of the poem is.

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➤ COMPETENCE: LINKING LITERATURE TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

- 7 DISCUSS.** The immortality of the soul is one of the certainties of Christianity that Emily Dickinson tested in her poems. Do you believe in a life after death?

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➤ COMPETENCE: CONTRASTING AUTHORS

- 8 DISCUSS** the similarities and differences between Dickinson's and Whitman's poetry as regards
- structure;
  - language;
  - themes;
  - the poet's attitude.