



As if the Sea should part

The idea of eternity and space, as far as the human mind can apprehend, puzzled Emily Dickinson's vivid imagination. She made it the centre of many of her poems, often through a single powerful image, as in the lines below.

Emily Dickinson
Poem 695

As if the Sea should part
And show a further Sea –
And that – a further – and the Three
But a Presumption be¹ –

- 5 Of Periods of Seas –
Unvisited by Shores –
Themselves the Verge of Seas to be –
Eternity – is Those –

1 But a Presumption be. Fossiero solo un presagio.

Time feels so vast that were it not

Time feels so vast that were it not
For an Eternity –
I fear me this Circumference
Engross my Finit¹ –

Emily Dickinson
Poem 802

- 5 To His exclusion, who prepare
By rudiments of Size
For the stupendous Volume
Of His Diameters –

1 Engross my Finit. Occuperebbe totalmente il mio essere finito.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ the poems and match the highlighted words with their meaning.

- 1 seems
- 2 shore
- 3 divide
- 4 incomplete structures
- 5 intervals

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 READ the two poems again and answer the following questions.

- 1 What makes the poet think of eternity in the first poem?
- 2 What function has eternity in the second poem?
- 3 Who does 'His' in line 5 refer to in the second poem?
- 4 What does he give the human being?



COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

3 FOCUS on the vocabulary and syntax. Choose the correct alternative.

- 1 The words are *simple / complex*, *evocative / factual* and *abstract / concrete*.
- 2 There is a prevalence of *nouns / adjectives*.
- 3 The sentences are *simple / complex*.

4 CONSIDER the first poem. Dickinson visualises the concept of eternity by using hyperbole and paradox. Write them down.

- Hyperbole:
- Paradox:

5 POINT out the unusual semantic areas in both poems.

- 1st poem:
- 2nd poem:

6 FIND the image standing for life in the second poem and explain its connotation. How is the figure of the Creator connoted?

COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS AND RELATIONSHIPS

7 SAY what Emily Dickinson has in common with the Metaphysical poets (→ 2.7).

8 COMPARE these two poems with the poem *L'infinito* by the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi. Then complete the table below.

	Leopardi's <i>L'infinito</i>	Dickinson's poems
the experience of eternity		
the contrast		
the image which conveys the idea of limited space		
the contemplation of the infinite		
the feeling in front of eternity		
the relationship between metre and syntactic structure		
the structure of the poem		

9 DISCUSS. The microscopic and the macroscopic worlds find a powerful means of expression in Dickinson's imagination. What instruments of investigation does physics offer to investigate these two worlds? Discuss this issue with the help of your physics teacher.