

ELA: Grade 8, Lesson 8, *Emily Dickinson Part I*

Lesson Focus: The focus of today’s lesson will be on Emily Dickinson and one of her poems, “I heard a Fly buzz - when I died.”

Practice Focus: Students will analyze an informational text to determine the main ideas; students will also analyze one of Dickinson’s poems using a strategy for unlocking its meaning.

Objective: Students will use “Emily Dickinson 1830-1866” and “I heard a Fly buzz - when I died” to learn about Emily Dickinson and one of her important poems with a focus on determining the main ideas in the texts as well as author’s craft for creating meaning.

Academic Vocabulary: recluse, frail, retiring, prominent, botany, geology, zoology, natural philosophy, ideology, gleaned, correspondence, intriguing, connotation, personification, symbolism, detached,

TN Standards: 8.RI.KID.1, 8.RI.KID.2, 8.RI.KID.3, 8.RI.CS.4, 8.RL.KID.1, 8.RL.KID.2, 8.RL.KID.3, 8.RL.CS.5, 8.RL.CS.6

Teacher Materials:

- Lesson script
- Chart paper
 - Will need to write out the TPCASTT template onto chart paper; you only need to include the headings for each section as the commentary will be covered in the script
 - Will need to write the independent practice questions on chart paper so students can see them and copy them onto their own paper

Student Materials:

- Paper, a pencil, and a surface to write on

Teacher Do	Students Do
<p>Opening (1 min)</p> <p>Hello! Welcome to Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series for literacy! Today’s lesson is for all our 8th graders out there, though everyone is welcome to tune in. This lesson is the third in this series.</p> <p>My name is ____ and I’m a ____ grade teacher in Tennessee schools. I’m so excited to be your teacher for this lesson! Welcome to my virtual classroom!</p> <p>If you didn’t see our previous lesson, you can find it at www.tn.gov/education. You can still tune in to today’s lesson if you haven’t seen any of our others. But it might be more fun if you first go back and watch our other lessons, since today we’ll be talking about things we learned previously.</p> <p>As a reminder, in this lesson set, we are studying some very well-regarded and widely studied poets. We have already learned about William Blake and his poetry. In this lesson and upcoming lessons, we will also learn about American poet, Emily Dickinson and the English poet, A.E. Housman.</p>	<p>Students gather materials for the lesson and prepare to engage with the lesson’s content.</p>

<p>Poetry has been a powerful mode of writing in American and British history and our goal is to gain a deeper understanding of some of the most successful poets and how they impacted their respective societies.</p> <p>We will begin today by learning about Emily Dickinson and her poetry! Before we get started, to participate fully in our lesson today, you will need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper, a pencil, and a surface to write on <p>Ok, let's begin!</p>	
<p>Intro (1 minute)</p> <p>Today our goal is to read an informational text, "Emily Dickinson, 1830-1866" in order to understand important details about Emily Dickinson that will assist us in understanding her poetry. We will also review the TPCASTT tool for understanding poetry we used in previous lessons. I will guide you in using this tool and you will practice with one of Dickinson's poems, "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died."</p> <p>We will begin with me reading the short informational text as a whole and then we will reread it and pause along the way for deeper understanding.</p> <p>At the end of the lesson, I will assign you independent work you can complete after the video ends.</p>	<p>Students listen to the teacher's introduction.</p>
<p>Teacher Model/Read-Aloud (10 minutes)</p> <p>Now, let's dig in to the first text we will be studying, which is a brief introduction to Emily Dickinson's life and work. The title of the informational text is "Emily Dickinson, 1830-1866" which of course indicates her life span and that she lived to be approximately 36 years of age. The author is not listed for this text so we will simply refer to him or her as "the author." Let's read the text:</p> <p>"Although Emily Dickinson lived much of her adult life as a recluse, which is someone who likes to be alone, and is often described as a frail, or delicate, and retiring, which means shy figure, there is a much greater range and depth to the poet and her work than these descriptions suggest.</p> <p>Emily Dickinson was born to a prominent, or famous, family in Amherst, Massachusetts. She spent her childhood studying subjects such as botany, which is the study of plants, geology, which is the study of earth, zoology, which is the</p>	<p>Students follow along, comprehending the text. They use teacher think-alouds and tips (e.g., definitions of words) to support their comprehension, and they think or write as directed in response to prompts and questions.</p>

study of animals, and natural philosophy, which is physical science, at Amherst Academy.

When her formal schooling ended, Dickinson was at an age when young women were expected to take care of the household and engage in social visits with friends and family. But as an independent woman and thinker, Dickinson often questioned the commonly held ideology, or set of ideas, of the time, including the expectations placed on women and the standard religious views supported by others she knew.

In particular, she dismissed the idea of marriage because of the burdens the role of wife placed on a woman. She wanted the freedom to express her own ideas and engage in her own pursuits.

Many of Dickinson's views can be gleaned, or gathered, from the numerous letters she wrote to her brother, sister-in-law, and friends. Although Dickinson limited her contact with others, she used her correspondence, or communication, as a way of socializing. And she often shared poems within her letters. In fact, almost all of Dickinson's poetry—around 1,800 poems in all—was either kept private or shared only with family and friends during her lifetime.

After Dickinson's death, her family discovered hand-sewn books in which Dickinson had written her poems. It wasn't until years later that the poems were published in their entirety, and Dickinson became known as one of the greatest poets of all time."

Now that you have a big picture view of the text, let's revisit the text paragraph by paragraph so we can analyze it at a deeper level.

"Although Emily Dickinson lived much of her adult life as a recluse, which is someone who likes to be alone, and is often described as a frail, or delicate, and retiring, which means shy figure, there is a much greater range and depth to the poet and her work than these descriptions suggest."

Notice the author uses the words "recluse," "frail," and "retiring" to describe Dickinson. Based on the context and the relationship of these words to each other, take a moment to describe Dickinson in your own words. Write your thoughts on your paper.

[Pause for 30 seconds]

Students answer teacher questions on their papers.

Did you write “withdrawn” or “nervous” or “hesitant”? Or something else similar? That is indeed the meaning of the combination of these words to describe Dickinson in this context. Let’s take 30 seconds and practice using this word in a sentence. In 1-2 sentences, describe someone you know who is shy and withdrawn. It can even be yourself! Be sure to use one of the vocabulary words - “recluse,” “frail,” or “retiring” in the same way they are used in the passage. ” Be sure to include precise detail of this person.

[Pause for 1 minute]

Excellent. Let’s revisit a sentence we read earlier.

“there is a much greater range and depth to the poet and her work than these descriptions suggest.”

What does the author mean here? In other words, what is the author saying the earlier descriptions of “recluse,” “frail,” or “retiring” suggest about Dickinson? Write your answer on your paper.

[Pause 30 seconds]

Thank you. The author seems to be implying someone who is shy or withdrawn is often considered to be someone who is shallow or untalented. That may or may not be true, right? The author seems to be cautioning us from making assumptions.

Let’s continue reading.

“Emily Dickinson was born to a prominent, or famous, family in Amherst, Massachusetts. She spent her childhood studying subjects such as botany, which is the study of plants, geology, which is the study of earth, zoology, which is the study of animals, and natural philosophy, which is physical science, at Amherst Academy.”

Based on what you hear in this paragraph, what are some inferences you can make about Emily Dickinson and her work? Take a moment and write your answer on your paper.

[Pause 1 minute]

Here is what I inferred from this paragraph. It says that Dickinson was born from a well-to-do or famous family. This

tells me she will have more opportunities and will have a greater likelihood of success than most people. The paragraph also says she spent her childhood studying complex subjects such as botany, geology, zoology, and natural philosophy. This tells me Dickinson's poetry will likely draw from a wide variety of academic subjects to inform her ideas. In other words, she will have a lot of ideas in the toolbox to help her creatively write poetry.

Let's revisit paragraph 3:

"When her formal schooling ended, Dickinson was at an age when young women were expected to take care of the household and engage in social visits with friends and family. But as an independent woman and thinker, Dickinson often questioned the commonly held ideology, or set of ideas, of the time, including the expectations placed on women and the standard religious views supported by others she knew."

Based on this description of Dickinson, how was her life and work similar to the life and work of a lot of women in today's society? Specifically, how does Dickinson resemble some of the shifts that have occurred in our society regarding the role and expectations of women? Take a moment and write your answer on your paper.

[Pause 1 minute]

It seems she really resembles some of the shifts that have occurred when it comes to the role of women in society. A lot of the traditional roles of women have been heavily challenged and have resulted in a lot of changes in our understandings of those roles. It seems like Dickinson helped in paving the way for this progress!

Let's keep reading:

"In particular, she dismissed the idea of marriage because of the burdens the role of wife placed on a woman. She wanted the freedom to express her own ideas and engage in her own pursuits."

This paragraph gets more specific about the ways Dickinson challenged societal views of women. Based on what we have discussed about poetry this week, why do you think Dickinson was particularly drawn to this type of writing? Write your answer on your paper.

[Pause 30 seconds]

Great work! Remember one of the unique aspects of poetry is there are no rules in writing it! For someone who is shy and yet likes to challenge the assumptions of society, poetry is a perfect type of writing. They can write using indirect words and there are no boundaries for their expression. Poetry is a type of writing that would therefore be very attractive to someone like Emily Dickinson.

Let's read the next paragraph:

"Many of Dickinson's views can be gleaned, or gathered, from the numerous letters she wrote to her brother, sister-in-law, and friends. Although Dickinson limited her contact with others, she used her correspondence, or communication, as a way of socializing. And she often shared poems within her letters. In fact, almost all of Dickinson's poetry—around 1,800 poems in all—was either kept private or shared only with family and friends during her lifetime."

Take a moment and write down on your paper one important detail or one important inference you made from this paragraph.

[pause 30 seconds]

Excellent job! One inference I made from this paragraph is Emily Dickinson loved writing poetry and it did not matter to her whether she would ever be famous for having written so much. Her motivation for writing was not to be famous but to communicate her thoughts and beliefs in unique ways to her friends and family. This is an interesting contrast to the widespread pursuit of fame today. It is good to be creative regardless of whether you have a broad audience!

Let's continue reading the next paragraph:

"After Dickinson's death, her family discovered hand-sewn books in which Dickinson had written her poems. It wasn't until years later that the poems were published in their entirety, and Dickinson became known as one of the greatest poets of all time."

This paragraph continues the thought of the previous one. It was not until years after her death that all of her poems were published. Her fame arrived after her death.

<p>Now we have a solid understanding of Dickinson's life and work. Let's take a brief look at one of her poems.</p>	
<p>Guided Practice (15 minutes)</p> <p>This poem by Dickinson is called "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died." Remember the poem we read called "The Fly" by William Blake? What is it about poets writing poems about flies! Well, let's find out. We are only going to do an initial read right now of Dickinson's poem and then we will take a deeper look into it shortly after. Let's read the poem.</p> <p>I heard a Fly buzz - when I died</p> <p>I heard a Fly buzz – when I died – The Stillness in the Room Was like the Stillness in the Air – Between the Heaves, or strong winds, of Storm –</p> <p>The Eyes around – had wrung them dry – And Breaths were gathering firm For that last Onset – when the King Be witnessed – in the Room –</p> <p>I willed my Keepsakes, which are items to remember, – Signed away What portion of me be Assignable, which means transferred – and then it was There interposed, or flew in-between, a Fly –</p> <p>With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz – Between the light – and me – And then the Windows failed – and then I could not see to see –</p> <p>This is a really unique poem that contains layers of meaning. Remember poetry is communicating meaning both directly and indirectly. It is a difficult genre of literature to analyze, which is why we are going to use the TPCASTT tool to help us do it. Let's refresh our memory of this tool before we dig into the poem deeper.</p> <p>Let's get started. The tool is called TPCASTT.</p> <p>[display TPCASTT template for students to see]</p> <p>Notice each of the sections begins with the respective letter in the acronym:</p>	<p>Students follow along and think and act as instructed, gradually gaining confidence and competence.</p> <p>Students will use the TPCASTT tool to analyze poetry.</p>

T = Title

P = Paraphrase

C = Connotation

A = Attitude/Tone

S = Shift(s)

T = Title (Revisiting the Title)

T = Theme

Let's create a fresh template so you can practice on it. On a clean sheet of paper, sketch 7 sections going down your paper like the one I'm showing you. Don't worry about labeling yet as I will go over each section individually. Your template does not need to look fancy or perfect. Just give yourself enough room in each section to take notes. It is important to take notes on what goes in each section so you will know how to complete them.

[Pause for 30 seconds]

Now, let's talk about each section. Each of these sections should be completed in sequential order. Label your first section "Title." You may want to make a note in this section, your goal is to consider the title of the poem and to make a prediction about what the poem is about. Poets are very intentional, or purposeful, about how they label their poems. There are always very important clues to the poem's meaning in the title, which is why it is a great place to start. For what reasons might the author have chosen the title, "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died"? Take a moment to jot down your thoughts about the title of this poem.

[pause for 30 seconds]

Thank you. In my notes, I wrote down the title "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died" is surprising. It immediately makes me ask some questions I hope the poem will answer. First, if you're dead, how can you hear something? And why would that be an important thing to note if you're dying? These are very intriguing, or interesting, questions the title gives us before we even begin the poem.

Now, let's read the poem again before we begin the next section. Pay close attention as you will be paraphrasing the poem after we read it.

[reread the poem]

I heard a Fly buzz - when I died

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves, or strong winds, of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset – when the King
Be witnessed – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes, which are items to remember, –
Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable, which means transferred – and then it was
There interposed, or flew in-between, a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –

Ok, let's try the next section in TPCASTT, "Paraphrase." Here the goal is to write *in your own words* exactly what happens in the poem. You are trying to write down what the poem says literally, on the surface, not its many layers of meaning. This is really a simple paraphrase. Take a few moments to paraphrase what you remember in the poem.

[pause for 30 seconds]

Thank you. In my notes, I have the following as a brief paraphrase:

When I died, I heard a fly buzz. The stillness in the room was so quiet. Everyone has been crying and is standing around watching and waiting for death to happen. I already took care of business with signing away my belongings and now here comes this fly out of nowhere between the light and me. And then everything went dark and I couldn't see anything anymore.

Can you see that I kept my paraphrase casual and simple? I am simply trying to capture the literal ideas I find in the poem.

Let's try the next section, "Connotation." Remember "connotation" means "an idea or feeling a word invokes in

addition to its literal meaning.” Here is where we start to dig a bit deeper. We’re looking for meaning beyond the literal. Poets use a lot of tools to do this, including figurative language, or non-literal language, imagery, sound devices, word choice, etc. Some of the most common figurative language devices are simile, metaphor, personification, which is when a thing such as an idea or animal is given human characteristics, and symbolism, which is the use of symbols to represent ideas. Did you notice any of these present in this poem on the first or second reads? Let’s read through the poem again. Look for any of these elements and take notes on your paper. You are not trying to capture every single one - only the ones you think are the most important to understanding the meaning of the poem.

[reread the poem]

I heard a Fly buzz - when I died

**I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves, or strong winds, of Storm –**

**The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset – when the King
Be witnessed – in the Room –**

**I willed my Keepsakes, which are items to remember, –
Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable, which means transferred – and then it was
There interposed, or flew in-between, a Fly –**

**With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –**

I will pause a moment to allow you to finish your notes.

[pause 1 minute]

Here are some things I noticed. First, I noticed the frequent use of hyphens to set apart phrases and ideas. You can’t see these because I am reading the poem orally but you can hear my pauses, which is what they are designed to do. This is a

good example of how punctuation can affect the meaning of the poem. Emily Dickinson is known for using hyphens in her poetry. When I read this particular poem and pause at the dashes, it feels like I am watching a movie where the shutter is opening and closing, only allowing me a glimpse at a time. This seems to parallel the delicate balance between life and death. This is emphasized in the last stanza where she says "Between the light - and me - and then the windows failed - and then I could not see to see." I also noticed the figurative use of the term "the King" is used to describe death. Death, the King is there to be witnessed by those in the room. I wonder what he is the King of? Maybe life? There are a number of other things I could have selected but I think you understand what is being asked for in this section.

Let's take a look at the next section, "Attitude." In this section, we are trying to figure out the speaker's attitude or tone of the poem. Is it humorous? Sarcastic? In awe? Jot down on your paper some adjectives you think capture the speaker's tone in this poem.

[pause 30 seconds]

I wrote down in my notes, "suspenseful," "amused," and "detached," which means a feeling of being disconnected from things. These words all capture elements of the author's attitude in the poem. There is a sense of not knowing what will come next, a sense the author is being lighthearted about things, and a sense the author is just observing things and not being emotionally attached. Remember the tone is an important tool the poet uses to affect how you as the reader are interpreting the poem.

Let's look at the next section, "Shift." Most poems have a shift, though it may be subtle. It is the moment there is a realization or a change in something. Look for key shift words like "but," "however," "though," or "although." There could also be punctual changes such as commas, periods, ellipses, semicolons, line breaks, etc.

Let's read the text once again to see where we can identify a shift.

[reread the poem]

I heard a Fly buzz - when I died

**I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves, or strong winds, of Storm –**

**The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset – when the King
Be witnessed – in the Room –**

**I willed my Keepsakes, which are items to remember, –
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Assignable, which means transferred – and then it was
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**With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –**

As you hear the text, where do you hear a shift? Take a few moments and write down on your paper where the shift happens and what you think it means.

[pause 1 minute]

In my notes, I marked I think the shift happens when the speaker says “and then it was There interposed a Fly -“ The speaker, of course, begins by mentioning the fly but then describes the events before death as if we are there with the others observing her dying. The shift pulls us back to seeing the room from her eyes and experiencing the last moment before death.

Let’s consider the next section, “Title, revisited.” Here, we are looking at the title again to see if it has taken on new meaning after our deeper analysis. Take a moment to write down on your paper any changes from your initial thoughts regarding the title.

[pause for 30 seconds]

After a deeper analysis, I think the title “I heard a Fly buzz - when I died” really seems to capture a lightheartedness to the poem. It’s so surprising to hear and even though the poem describes a scene of death, there is a comic or absurd

<p>sense to focusing on the fly and the noise it makes at the time of death.</p> <p>We've reached the final section, "Theme." In this section, we are bringing everything together to determine the underlying message of the poem. What does it say about humanity or the world we live in? Take a moment and write down your thoughts on your paper.</p> <p>[pause 30 seconds]</p> <p>Great job! In my notes, I believe this poem is really adding a lightheartedness to the scene of death. Death is inevitable and we ultimately have little control over it. The speaker paints a familiar scene of grief and even mentions the practical things that happen before we die such as signing over our belongings. But death itself is ever so brief and even the simple things can still be noticed in such an important event.</p> <p>I hope you find this tool useful. Keep in mind that is all it is intended for - a helpful tool to assist you in uncovering a poem's meaning.</p>	
<p><u>Independent Work</u> (1 minute)</p> <p>[Teacher - will need to write the independent practice questions on chart paper so students can see them and copy them onto their own paper]</p> <p>Let's reflect on today's lesson. Today we learned about Emily Dickinson's life and work and used a handy tool to analyze one of her poems. In the next lesson, we will use this tool to analyze another one of Dickinson's poems called "Hope is the thing with feathers." For your independent work, please respond in writing to the following prompts:</p> <p>[teacher - display paper for students to read]</p> <p>Students, please write these questions down on your notebook paper so you will have them handy for when you are responding in writing.</p> <p>1. What stood out to you the most regarding Emily Dickinson's life and work? What personalities in society today are similar to Dickinson? Are they positive or negative influences? Why?</p>	<p>Students will respond to a writing prompt that synthesizes their knowledge from today's lesson.</p>

<p>2. What did you learn the most in our analysis of Dickinson's poem, "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died"? What was the most important thing you learned in using the TPCASTT tool to analyze this poem?</p> <p>3. What are your thoughts about the poem? Is it silly or something important to consider? Explain your answer.</p>	
<p>Closing (1 min)</p> <p>I enjoyed working on analyzing Emily Dickinson and her poetry with you today! Thank you for inviting me into your home. I look forward to seeing you in our next lesson in Tennessee's At Home Learning Series! Bye!</p>	



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