

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

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# “Hope” Is the Thing with Feathers

*by Emily Dickinson*

Grades 5–8 · Common Core RL.6.4, RL.6.2, RL.6.5

Dickinson wrote this poem around 1861; it was published after her death, in 1891. It is an extended metaphor written in three four-line stanzas, using slant rhyme and a hymn-like meter. This is the 1891 printed text; in her manuscript Dickinson used dashes, which early editors changed to commas.



## THE POEM

Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the words,  
And never stops at all,  
5 And sweetest in the gale is heard;  
And sore must be the storm  
That could abash the little bird  
That kept so many warm.  
I ‘ve heard it in the chillest land,  
10 And on the strangest sea;  
Yet, never, in extremity,  
It asked a crumb of me.

## VOCABULARY

**perches** — sits or rests, as a bird does**gale** — a very strong wind**abash** — to embarrass or make ashamed; here, to silence or defeat**extremity** — a moment of greatest danger or need

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is hope compared to, and why is that a good comparison?

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2. What do the “gale” and the “storm” stand for in a person’s life?

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3. Find the line that says the bird sings “without the words.” What do you think that means?

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4. In the last stanza, what does the bird ask for in return? What does this say about hope?

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5. Dickinson’s manuscript used dashes where this printed version has commas. How might dashes change the way the poem sounds or feels?

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## WRITING PROMPT

Pick a feeling (courage, fear, joy, worry). Write a 3-stanza poem that describes it as an animal: where it lives, what it does in hard times, and what it asks of you.

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## “Hope” Is the Thing with Feathers — Answer Key

1. A bird. Like a bird, hope is small, light, sings sweetly and can be heard even in bad times; it “perches in the soul.”
2. Hardships and troubles; the bird is heard “sweetest” in the gale, meaning hope matters most in hard times.
3. Hope is a feeling, not a set of words or reasons; it keeps going without explanation (“never stops at all”).
4. Nothing: “Yet, never, in extremity, / It asked a crumb of me.” Hope gives freely and asks nothing back.
5. Dashes create pauses and emphasis, making the poem feel breathless, personal and hesitant; accept supported answers.

*Read the full poem online: [poetrycatalog.com/hope-emily-dickinson/](http://poetrycatalog.com/hope-emily-dickinson/)*