

## Before You Read

# *If I Can Stop One Heart from Breaking and I Stepped from Plank to Plank*

## Connect to the Poems

Are you an outgoing person, or are you quiet and shy? Do you enjoy taking risks, or are you cautious and careful?

**Partner Talk** With a partner, discuss whether helping others can make one's life better. Can a shy person help others? How?

## Build Background

During Emily Dickinson's lifetime, women were expected to get married, keep a comfortable home, and raise children.

- Dickinson chose to live differently from many women of her time. She never married and lived her entire life in her parents' home.
- Dickinson spent most of her time alone, writing poetry. She rarely traveled or visited others, but she maintained close relationships through writing letters to friends.

## Set Purposes for Reading

### **BQ** BIG Question

As you read, pay attention to what seems important to the speaker of each poem. Ask yourself, who does the speaker want to be? How does the speaker choose to live?

### **Literary Element** Assonance and Consonance

**Assonance** is the repetition of vowel sounds, especially in a line of poetry. **Consonance** is the repetition of consonant sounds in stressed syllables. For example, in the sentence "Beautiful babies bounce," the three words repeat the consonant *b* sound.

Poets use assonance, consonance, and other sound devices to create pleasing combinations of sound and a sense of rhythm. Assonance and consonance are also used to emphasize particular words that are important to the poem's meaning. To find assonance and consonance in a poem, read the poem aloud and listen for repeated sounds. Notice how these sound combinations add to the musical quality of Dickinson's poems.

### Learning Objectives

For pages 604–607

In studying this text, you will focus on the following objectives:

#### Literary Study:

- Analyzing assonance.
- Analyzing consonance.

## Meet Emily Dickinson



**Private Poet** Emily Dickinson was born in 1830. A shy woman, Dickinson seldom left her home in Amherst, Massachusetts. Her poetry, however, reveals a lively, sensitive, and original human being. Of the 1,775 poems she wrote, only seven were published during her lifetime, and none with her consent.



Literature Online

**Author Search** For more about Emily Dickinson, go to [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com) and enter QuickPass code GL29763u5.

# If I Can Stop One Heart from Breaking

Emily Dickinson

*Mr. Robin.* Fred Cuming. Oil on board. Private Collection, ©Manya Igel Fine Arts, London.



If I can stop one Heart from breaking  
I shall not live in vain<sup>2</sup>  
If I can ease one Life the Aching  
Or cool one Pain

- 5 Or help one fainting Robin  
Unto his Nest again  
I shall not live in Vain.

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2 To *live in vain* means "to have a life without purpose or value."

## **BQ** BIG Question

What positive actions does the speaker consider important?

## **Assonance and Consonance**

Say the word *vain* aloud. In what other words in the poem is the vowel sound in *vain* repeated?

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# I Stepped from Plank to Plank

Emily Dickinson

I stepped from Plank to Plank  
A slow and cautious way  
The Stars about my Head I felt  
About my Feet the Sea.

- 5 I knew not but the next  
Would be my final inch –  
This gave me that precarious Gait<sup>7</sup>  
Some call Experience.

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7 *Precarious gait* means "an uncertain or unsteady way of walking."

## **Assonance and Consonance**

Read aloud the first stanza of the poem. What consonant sound is repeated?

## After You Read

### Respond and Think Critically

1. In "If I Can Stop One Heart from Breaking," whom does the speaker wish to help? [Recall]
2. What does the image of a fainting robin in "If I Can Stop One Heart from Breaking" suggest? [Interpret]
3. Why is it important for the speaker in "If I Can Stop One Heart from Breaking" to "not live in vain"? [Summarize]
4. In "I Stepped from Plank to Plank," why does the speaker step in a "cautious way"? [Infer]
5. Each poem teaches a lesson. Which lesson do you think is more valuable? Explain. [Evaluate]
6. **BQ** **BIG Question** What kind of person does the speaker of each poem choose to be? Explain. [Analyze]

### Academic Vocabulary

In Emily Dickinson's time, many **restrictions** kept most women from doing things that men did. Women could not vote, many married women could not own property, and most women did not work outside the home. To become more familiar with the word *restrictions*, fill out the graphic organizer below.

definition		synonyms
<b>restriction</b>		
antonyms		sentence/image

### TIP

#### Inferring

To answer question 4, reread the first stanza of the poem "I Stepped from Plank to Plank." Ask yourself the following questions:

- On what is the speaker walking?
- Does this place seem to be safe and secure?
- What could happen if the speaker is not careful?

#### FOLDABLES Study Organizer

Keep track of your ideas about the **BIG Question** in your unit Foldable.



Literature Online

#### Selection Resources

For Selection Quizzes, eFlashcards, and Reading-Writing Connection activities, go to [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com) and enter QuickPass code GL29763u5.