

If You Were Coming in the Fall

By Emily Dickinson

If you were coming in the fall,
I'd brush the summer by
With half a smile and half a spurn,
As housewives do a fly.

If I could see you in a year, 5
I'd wind the months in balls,
And put them each in separate drawers,
Until their time befalls.

If only centuries delayed,
I'd count them on my hand, 10
Subtracting till my fingers dropped
Into Van Diemen's land.

If certain, when this life was out,
That yours and mine should be,
I'd toss it yonder like a rind, 15
And taste eternity.

But now, all ignorant of the length
Of time's uncertain wing,
It goads me, like the goblin bee,
That will not state its sting. 20

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What would the speaker do if “you were coming in the fall?”

- A) The speaker would brush the summer by.
- B) The speaker would wind the months into balls.
- C) The speaker would count the centuries on his or her hands.
- D) The speaker would toss life aside like a rind.

2. How does the poet organize ideas in this poem?

- A) The poet organizes ideas in stanzas of four lines each.
- B) The poet organizes ideas in paired lines of three syllables each.
- C) The poet organizes ideas by gradually increasing the number of beats in each line throughout the poem.
- D) The poet organizes ideas by gradually decreasing the number of beats in each line throughout the poem.

3. Read lines 1-4 of the poem:

If you were coming in the fall,
I'd brush the summer by
With half a smile and half a spurn,
As housewives do a fly.

What can you conclude from these lines about the speaker’s attitude toward summer and the addressee? (The addressee is the person to whom the speaker is addressing the poem.)

- A) Summer and the addressee are less important to the speaker than a fly is.
- B) Summer and the addressee are equally important to the speaker.
- C) The addressee is more important to the speaker than summer is.
- D) The addressee is less important to the speaker than summer is.

4. What is the speaker's attitude toward time?

- A) welcoming
- B) indifferent
- C) uncertain
- D) confident

5. What is a theme of the poem?

- A) the life of a housewife
- B) time
- C) summer
- D) fall

6. Read lines 5-9 from the poem:

If I could see you in a year, 5
I'd wind the months in balls,
And put them each in separate drawers,
Until their time befalls.

Why might the speaker compare months to balls that he or she would wind and put in drawers?

- A) to encourage readers to spend time organizing their personal lives in the coming year
- B) to make fun of people who spend long periods of time waiting for something that will never happen
- C) to suggest that a month can seem like an endless amount of time when a person is waiting for something
- D) to convey how unimportant the months are compared to seeing the addressee in a year

7. Read lines 13-16 from the poem:

If certain, when this life was out,
That yours and mine should be,
I'd toss it yonder like a rind, 15
And taste eternity.

What does "it" refer to in these lines?

- A) "this life" (line 11)
- B) "yours" (line 12)
- C) "mine" (line 13)
- D) "a rind" (line 14)

8. What word or words in the poem indicate that it is addressed to someone?

9. Put lines 13-16 into your own words.

If certain, when this life was out,
That yours and mine should be,
I'd toss it yonder like a rind, 15
And taste eternity.

10. What is the speaker's general attitude toward the addressee? Support your answer with evidence from the poem.
