

The poems below both deal with the subject of darkness and night. Read each poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay discuss the speakers' differing views of their experiences with darkness and night and explain how they are conveyed by the poet's techniques. Consider such elements as structure, point-of-view, imagery and tone.

We grow accustomed to the Dark—
When Light is put away—
As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp
To witness her Goodbye—

A Moment—We uncertain step
For newness of the night—
Then—fit our Vision to the Dark—
And meet the Road—erect—

And so of larger—Darkness—
Those Evening of the Brain—
When not a Moon disclose a sign—
Or Star—come out—within—

The Bravest—gropes a little—
And sometimes hit a Tree
Directly in the Forehead—
But as they learn to see—

Either the Darkness alters—
Or something in the sight
Adjusts itself to Midnight—
And Life steps almost straight.

—Emily Dickinson

Acquainted with the Night

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry

Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-by;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
I have been one acquainted with the night.

—Robert Frost

Guided Analysis of “We grow accustomed to the Dark—” and “Acquainted with the Night”

	Emily Dickinson	Robert Frost	
Literary device/technique	Text	Text	Effect/meaning
<i>Paraphrase</i>			Continue paraphrase here
<i>Shift?</i>			
<i>Point of view</i>			

	Emily Dickinson	Robert Frost	
Literary device/technique <i>Imagery</i>	Text	Text	Effect/meaning
<i>Stanza 1</i>			
<i>Stanza 2</i>			
<i>Stanza 3</i>			
<i>Stanza 4</i>			
<i>Stanza 5</i>			
<i>How does the speaker experience darkness/night in each stanza?</i>			
<i>Stanza 1</i>			
<i>Stanza 2</i>			

	Emily Dickinson	Robert Frost	
Literary device/technique	Text	Text	Effect/meaning
Stanza 3			
Stanza 4			
Stanza 5			
<i>Tone of each:</i>			
Stanza 1			
Stanza 2			
Stanza 3			
Stanza 4			

Guided Analysis of “We grow accustomed to the Dark—” and “Acquainted with the Night”

Suggested responses	Emily Dickinson	Effect/meaning	Robert Frost	Effect/meaning
Literary device/technique Paraphrase	Text We grow used to being in the dark—like when the neighbor leaves and takes her lamp with her, and we witness her goodbye. / When darkness is new—we are uncertain, our steps unsure, but when we adjust to the darkness, we become sure-footed and walk upright. / The same is true for the “larger” darkness, lack of knowledge, uncertainty about ourselves and the world around us. / However, the BRAVE among us move forward anyway—risking even harm to find their way, and they learn from their mistakes. / So either the darkness within us changes or we learn to adjust ourselves to these larger Darknesses and are able to move through our lives “almost straight.”		Text The speaker of the poem is familiar with night and all of the negative aspects associated with it. He’s been to a place that no light can reach./ He has experienced profound sorrow, so much so that he was unable to reach out to those around him./ He’s heard the sound of others crying in the night, but they don’t reach out to him either, increasing his solitude./ Even the light of the moon gave no clear direction or comfort but simply was in the solitude of that time.	
Shift?	There are two shifts—one at line 9 – “And so” —the shift here is a movement from literal to figurative. The second shift occurs in line 17 “Either” —shifts from an assertion “they learn to see” —to the explanation of how that occurs	Takes something common that we all know – darkness and likens it to something else we all experience – uncertainty and lack of knowledge The second shift explains our “options” to living with the larger darkness	No shift	There is no shift, no change. Everything is as it was, with no promise for change.
Point of view	Emily Dickinson writes this poem in first person PLURAL point-of-view	The plural point-of-view of the poem makes it universal—she’s writing about a common experience for all people, and the message is for all as well—it creates a sense of comfort that “I am not the only one” who suffers from doubt, uncertainty and lack of knowledge.	The poem is written in first person singular.	The first person singular point of view makes the poem personal, exclusionary. This is about HIS experience and no one else’s. Even the cries he hears in the night are not about him. He is alone and desolate.

Suggested responses	Emily Dickinson	Effect/meaning	Robert Frost	Effect/meaning
Literary device/technique Imagery	Text	Effect/meaning	Text	Effect/meaning
Stanza 1	“As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp/To witness her Goodbye”	The image here is ambiguous—one of comfort of the neighbor and her lamp, but also a sense of loneliness with the goodbye.	“walked out in rain—and back in rain” “outwalked the furthest city light”	Both of these images suggest a lack of light, even sunshine and warmth, but rather darkness and misery.
Stanza 2	“meet the Road—erect”	There is a sense of power and certainty/pride in this image.	“looked down the saddest city lane” “dropped my eyes”	Even in the city, a populous place, the speaker is alone, unwilling to look for help or hope. He belongs on the “saddest city lane.”
Stanza 3	“When not a Moon disclose a sign”	Again, we see the pervasiveness of darkness, that not even the moon can break through and relieve the darkness.	“stood still and stopped the sound of feet” “an interrupted cry”	Contradictory auditory images here suggest that the speaker listens for the sounds of others (the alliterative sibilance suggesting a ssssh sound), but all that he hears is the plaintive but interrupted call that has nothing to do with him.
Stanza 4	“sometimes hit a Tree/Directly in the Forehead”	This image provides a sense of danger and pain that Dickinson implies is necessary for learning how to live with the darkness.	“further still at an unearthly height, one luminary clock”	Even the solace of the moon is out of reach.
Stanza 5	“Life steps almost straight”	The ultimate goal for those who live (all of us) in the darkness. We can not expect perfection, but rather satisfaction and a degree of certainty and stability if we learn to “adjust our sight.”	“proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right”	The lack of commitment, even from nature, increases the sense of hopelessness and desolation.
How does the speaker experience darkness/night in each stanza?	Note: With Dickinson, she expresses her experience in universal terms—relating that what happens to her is what happens to us all. “grow accustomed” “light put away”	These details assure that all will experience darkness but that we can get used to it		Night is something the speaker is intimately acquainted with.
Stanza 1		We have to adjust, “fit our vision” but it can be done and once it is, we can “meet the Road—erect.”	“I have been one acquainted with the night.”	It is a time of sadness, loneliness, and self-imposed isolation
Stanza 2	“we fit our Vision to the Dark”	The metaphorical darkness – the sense of doubt, uncertainty, lack of knowledge that all men experience, including the speaker.	“I have outwalked the furthest city light.”	
Stanza 3	“larger Darknesses”		“When far away an interrupted cry Came over houses from another street,”	In the quietude of the night, he’s heard the pain of others.

Stanza 4	“grope a little”	It is not easy or without risk to pursue truth in the dark, but even if we fumble, we’ll gain something.	“And further still at an unearthly height, One luminary clock against the sky”	The only light (his only comfort) comes from the cold light of the moon, which is out of reach.
Stanza 5	“Darkness alters,” “adjust itself to Midnight”	Because of our “groping,” we are able to function, step “almost straight,” because either the darkness inside us shifts or we adjust ourselves to it.	“Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.”	And nothing provides him hope or direction.
Tone of each: Note: The tone is revealed primarily through the images of each stanza; thus the meaning/effect is the same commentary about the imagery.				
Stanza 1	A sense of uncertainty	The ambiguity of the stanza reinforces this tone.	Isolated	Both of these images suggest a lack of light, even sunshine and warmth, but rather darkness and misery.
Stanza 2	Shift/ from uncertainty to confidence	There is a sense of power and certainty/pride in the images of this stanza.	Sorrowful	Even in the city, a populous place, the speaker is alone, unwilling to look for help or hope. He belongs on the “saddest city lane.”
Stanza 3	Back to uncertainty, doubt – overwhelmed	Again, we see the pervasiveness of darkness, that not even the moon can break through and relieve the darkness.	Aware	Contradictory auditory images here suggest that the speaker listens for the sounds of others (the alliterative sibilance suggesting a ssssh sound), but all that he hears is the plaintive but interrupted call that has nothing to do with him.
Stanza 4	Determined	This image provides a sense of danger and pain that Dickinson implies is necessary for learning how to live with the darkness.	Distant	Even the solace of the moon is out of reach.
Stanza 5	Resolved and certain	The ultimate goal for those who live (all of us) in the darkness. We can not expect perfection, but rather satisfaction and a degree of certainty and stability if we learn to “adjust our sight.”	Uncertain	The lack of commitment, even from nature, increases the sense of hopelessness and desolation.

Note: Dickinson’s poem is written in present tense, suggesting the unending cycle of darkness, doubt and uncertainty that lives in all men, but also suggesting a hope for the future, that existence itself, “being,” gives opportunity for growth of knowledge, an adjustment to the “larger Darknesses.”

However, Frost’s poem is written in past tense, suggesting no forward progression, that whatever he is writing about is over and done. He relives the past with no promise for the future, further emphasizing the desolate spirit of the poem.