

# 6

## Lesson Six

### FOCUS: Rhythm and Meter

#### VOCABULARY WORDS

From “Because I could not stop for Death –”

**Gossamer, n.**

1. An extremely delicate variety of gauze, used especially for veils
2. A cobweb

**Tippet, n.**

A woman’s fur cape or woolen shawl

**Tulle, n.**

Fine (often starched) net used for veils, tutus, or gowns

**Cornice, n.**

An ornamental molding around the wall of a room just below the ceiling

A poem’s meaning can be found in its structural, stylistic, and verbal components. Two such components are rhythm and meter, long regarded as distinguishing features of verse. Poems may be written in *fixed forms*—traditional verse forms that require certain predetermined structural elements of *meter*, *rhythm*, and *rhyme*, such as a *sonnet* or a *ballad*—or open form. Not all poets write in fixed forms or meter, but all poets employ rhythm. Rhythm is created by the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a poetic line. Scansion is the art of listening carefully to the sounds of a poem and trying to make sense of it. This includes paying attention to each poetic foot, each *stressed* or *unstressed* syllable, and—if applicable—to the poem’s rhyme scheme.

Most nineteenth-century poets, including Emily Dickinson, wrote primarily in fixed forms with identifiable meters. Dickinson drew her meter from Protestant hymns sung in the churches in Amherst, Massachusetts.

### ?? Discussion Activities

When scanning a poem, use an accent (´) over each stressed syllable and a breve or “little round cup” (˘) over each unstressed syllable. Here are examples of how to scan one of Dickinson’s poems:

Because I could not stop for Death –  
 He kindly stopped for me –  
 The Carriage held but just Ourselves –  
 And Immortality.

Have students scan “Because I could not stop for Death –.” Ask your students how scanning a poem helps them understand its meaning.

Find a recording of the hymns “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” and “Oh God Our Help In Ages Past”. Notice that one can “sing” the poem above to the tune of both hymns.

### Writing Exercise

Ask students to consider a favorite song and write a short comparison to Dickinson’s poetry. Does it employ meter, rhythm, or rhyme? How do fixed forms help the listener memorize the song?

### Homework

Read “A little East of Jordan,” “Come slowly – Eden!,” and “All overgrown with cunning moss.” Read “From *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson*” (pp. 12–13) in the Reader’s Guide.