

There is no frigate like a book

There is no frigate like a book
To take us lands away,
Nor any coursers like a page
Of prancing poetry.

This traverse may the poorest take
Without oppress of toll;
How frugal is the chariot
That bears a human soul!

Emily Dickinson



Emily Dickenson
American Poet
December 10, 1830 – May 15, 1886



- Frigate
- Coursers
- Prancing
- Frugal
- Traverse
- Oppress
- Toll
- bears

- Ship
- Fast horses
- Energetically moving
- Cheap
- Journey
- Pressure
- Paying a fee
- Carries

The poem suggests that reading a book about a place is as good as going there. What do you think about this idea? Do you agree or disagree?

“There is no frigate (pronunciation *fri-guht*) like a book” is a celebration of the power of reading. It reminds us how amazing books are, and reminds us that we should not take reading for granted. Reading is the best way to escape your humdrum life, and go out and “see” the world. This poem even suggests that reading might be better than actual travel. Think of the places you have “seen” and the people you have “met” while reading. You may not be physically leaving your armchair when you read, but you are covering kilometers of new territory in your imagination.

The poem explains the awesomeness of reading by comparing a book to various modes of transport. This string of comparisons reminds us of the true joy of reading - the fact that it lets us hitch rides with all kinds of different characters and travel far and wide with them in our imaginations, without even paying a cent.

The speaker is amazed and just flat-out moved by how a simple thing like a book can take us far away – and this sense of awe is also aimed at the power of the human imagination. We are transported by books because we can imagine ourselves in them, and our ability to travel in our minds and souls is what allows us to escape our circumstances, no matter how bad they are, even if just for a little while.

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ANALYSES

Lines 1 and 2

The speaker compares a book to a frigate. (a big ship)
What do ships do? They take us to places.

These lines say that a book is even better than a frigate. A book is like the best boat ever, which carries us to far away places. We are reminded of the freedom and sense of possibility that reading afford us.

How does a book take us “lands away”? What does reading do according to this poem?

Lines 3 and 4

prance – to walk or dance in a proud way

Here the poet compares a book to a high-spirited, light-footed horse.
She says that reading is even better than taking a ride on this great horse

Lines 5 to 6

Why do you think Dickinson brings up the economic problem of the toll road? Why do you think the speaker goes out of her way to mention that even “the poorest” reader is able to take this kind of trip?

Books may cost money, but reading them are free. Anyone with access to books is able to travel in these magical bookmobiles along the superhighways of the imagination.

The speaker expresses this simple idea by saying that even the poorest person can take this kind of “traverse”, or journey, without ever being “oppressed” by having to stop at a tollbooth and pay.

Even those limited by the hardship in their real lives, can use books as an escape to unknown places.

Lines 7 to 8

frugal – careful not to spend very much money

chariot - a two-wheeled vehicle drawn by horses, used in ancient racing and warfare. It was driven by a charioteer.

What do you think the speaker means by these lines? What statement does the poem make about the “soul”?



The speaker here expresses wonder at the fact that reading can carry your “soul” or imagination on a kind of joyride and it is free.

These lines remind us that our bodies are just shells for what really matters – our souls. Books and stories are the “chariots” that allow us to be free to roam in spirit, if not in body.

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SETTING

The setting is kind of a fantastical landscape. It is a pretty spectacular one, populated by magnificent ships sailing away to far-off lands and knights (a man of high social rank who fought as a soldier on a horse in the past) trotting around on prancing horses. This poem does not actually represent a place, instead it asks us to imagine imagination itself.

The central metaphor (one that the poem is based around) of this poem asks us to compare reading a book to travelling to far-away places. The travel that goes on here is imaginary, and the speaker is asking us to summon up the idea of travel in our minds, not a specific voyage.

(A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes an object or action in a way that is not literally true, but explains an idea or make a comparison. A metaphor states that one thing is another thing. It equates (to consider one thing to be the same as or equal to another thing) those two things not because they are actually the same, but for the sake of symbolism)

POETIC DEVICES

Line 1 is an example of a simile. A book is being compared to a ship.

Explanation: A book can take you places in your imagination like a ship takes you places in reality.

Line 4 is an example of alliteration. (sound device)

“prancing poetry”

Although we do not identify any rhyme scheme the imagery and figurative language make this a meaningful poem.



ESSAY

Why do you read books? What are your thoughts on the escapist stance that this poem takes? Do you read to get away from life, or to learn more about it – or both?

Instructions

Write an essay of 100 to 120 words.

You must plan, write a draft, edit and write the final essay in your creative writing book.