

## **The Flea**

by John Donne

MARK but this flea, and mark in this,  
How little that which thou deniest me is ;  
It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,  
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.  
Thou know'st that this cannot be said                                           5  
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead ;  
    Yet this enjoys before it woo,  
    And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two ;  
    And this, alas ! is more than we would do.

O stay, three lives in one flea spare,                                                 10  
Where we almost, yea, more than married are.  
This flea is you and I, and this  
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is.  
Though parents grudge, and you, we're met,  
And cloister'd in these living walls of jet.                                           15  
    Though use make you apt to kill me,  
    Let not to that self-murder added be,  
    And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since  
Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?                                                 20  
Wherein could this flea guilty be,  
Except in that drop which it suck'd from thee?  
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou  
Find'st not thyself nor me the weaker now.  
'Tis true ; then learn how false fears be ;                                                 25  
Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,  
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

**Read through the entire poem once, without making any comments.**

**Now, read the first stanza**

- ✓ What is the meaning of "Mark(e) but this flea, and mark(e) in this,..."? Why the use of such direct address?
- ✓ What is the "this"?
- ✓ Why is it significant that the two people's blood is joined in the flea?

- ✓ What is meant by "Thou knowest that this cannot be said/A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead."?
- ✓ Define "maidenhead".
- ✓ What is meant by the repetition of "this" in the first stanza?
- ✓ What is the religious imagery in this stanza?
- ✓ What is the rhyme scheme of the first stanza?
- ✓ What do you think the first stanza is about (literal then metaphorical)?

**Read the second stanza**

- ✓ Visualize the speaker talking to the other person. Where does flea fit in?
- ✓ What is about to happen that causes the speaker to say "Oh, stay, three lives in one flea spare,..."?
- ✓ Whose lives are in the flea?
- ✓ What is the religious imagery in this stanza?
- ✓ What is the definition of "jet", of "grudge", and of "cloistered"?
- ✓ What does the speaker mean when stating "Though use make you apt to kill me..."
- ✓ What is the rhyme scheme of the second stanza?
- ✓ What do you think the second stanza is about (literal then metaphorical)?
- ✓ How does the speaker's argument change from the first to the second stanza?

**Do the third stanza on your own**

**General Questions:**

- ✓ What appears to be the relationship between the speaker and who he/she is speaking to?
- ✓ What is the attitude/tone of the speaker?
- ✓ What issue or problem is the speaker trying to address?
- ✓ How does consistent rhyme scheme add to the speaker's argument.
- ✓ How does the speaker's argument "move" through the poem?
- ✓ If time, write a personal response to the poem explaining what the poem is about and why you think that.