

# HAVE YOU GOT A BROOK IN YOUR LITTLE HEART

Emily Dickinson

## About the Author and Text

leading light  
inspiring

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886), a luminary among America's greatest poets, is often referred to as the recluse of Amherst, the town in Massachusetts where she lived and died during her 55 years. Her poems, using unconventional syntax and structures, are full of surprises in thought and imagery. Emily studied at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley, where she excelled, becoming proficient in Latin, English Literature, and other subjects. But owing to frequent bouts of ill health, she left the seminary. We know only a few details of her personal and interior life. But her poems remain a testimony to an intensely sensitive mind. Emily Dickinson died at the age of 55 from Bright's disease. The poet had told her sister Vinnie, who was close to her all through her life, to burn her letters. While trying to do this, Vinnie, to her surprise, discovered a box with 1,700 of Emily's poems. Vinnie refrained from burning these treasures. Mabel Todd, a family friend, published the first edition of the poems in 1893. Although her poems were unfavourably received upon publication, she is now regarded as a major American writer.

'Have you got a brook in your little heart' was included in the 1924 edition of Dickinson's *Complete Poems*. The poem is typical of Dickinson's poetic work in its use of symbolism and evocative use of language to express abstract ideas and ideals. The poet talks about the little brooks of love and kindness that need to be nurtured in our hearts.

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN . . .

1. Do you know what is 'personification'? Look up the term and learn what is personification.
2. Look up and read the poem "Hope" is the Thing with Feathers' by Emily Dickinson. Can you see the use of personification in this poem?



Have you got a **brook**<sup>1</sup> in your little heart,  
Where **bashful**<sup>2</sup> flowers blow,  
And blushing birds go down to drink -  
And shadows **tremble**<sup>3</sup> so -

And nobody, knows, so still it flows,  
That any brook is there,  
And yet your little **draught**<sup>4</sup> of life  
Is daily drunken there -

Why - look out for the little brook in March,  
When the rivers overflow,  
And the snows come hurrying from the hills,  
And the bridges often go -

And *later*, in *August* it may be,  
When the meadows **parching**<sup>5</sup> lie,  
Beware, lest this little brook of life,  
Some burning noon go dry!



## Points to Ponder

While Emily Dickinson was a prolific poet, she was never published widely during her lifetime. She wrote around 1800 poems, of which only around 10 were published during her lifetime. Contemporary commentaries indicate that she was hesitant to seek fame as a writer, and preferred anonymity. Literary history has many instances of early women writers who either wrote anonymously or used male pseudonyms to find a foothold in a predominantly male-dominated literary scene. For instance, Mary Ann Evans took on the pseudonym George Eliot to publish her novels, which are now acclaimed as classics of Victorian Literature. Mary Alcott, the author of *Little Women*, wrote as A. M. Barnard for the *Atlantic Monthly*. These were choices forced on them by a literary establishment that routinely overlooked women's writing as trifling, non-serious literature. Do you know of any such woman writer from Indian literatures?