

“Faith” is a fine invention
When Gentlemen can *see*—
But *microscopes* are prudent
In an Emergency.

—Emily Dickinson

faith: to trust without proof or evidence; invention: thought up or fabricated; microscopes a tool used to examine small things so that they appear larger for observation; prudent: cautious or discreet in conduct; emergency: unexpected circumstances or occurrence that needs immediate attention.

Faith means to trust in something or someone without asking for proof or evidence. It is almost like trust. I looked up invention just to see the different meanings and I think in this case Dickinson meant something thought up or fabricated. Microscopes are a tool used in examining small things so that they are seen much larger for observation. I have to admit I was not quite sure what prudent meant, but after looking it up I found that it means cautious or discreet in conduct. I looked up emergency so I could get a better definition to see how the word fit in with this poem. I found that it means unexpected circumstances or occurrence that needs immediate attention.

“Faith” is enclosed in quotation marks; invention is modified by the word “fine”; faith is only a fine invention when “Gentlemen can see”; “see” is put in italics as is “microscopes” in the third line; prudent modifies microscopes when used in “In an emergency”; there are two marks of punctuation in the poem: a dash breaks (or balances) the poem in two-line sections or couplets; the period concludes the final line of the second couplet; in addition to the convention of capitalizing the first word of each line there are two additional words capitalized: Gentlemen and Emergency; the word “But” follows the dash and begins the third line. The poem’s rhythm is balanced: there are six stresses in each part of the poem, three in each line. In the first line the stress falls on the single syllable of the first word “Faith”; What else?

- * What does it mean to call “Faith” a “fine invention”?
- * Is “Faith” related to *microscopes* and if so how?
- * Does the “when” function to limit the scope of faith in the poem?
- * What is the relationship between the religious term “Faith” and the scientific tool *microscopes*?
- * How do the two italicized words function together in the poem?
- * What is the relationship (is it hierarchical?) between the embracing enclosure of quotation marks and the visual slant of italics?
- * What is the relationship between the two sections of the poem?
- * Why “but”?
- * What is the significance of the “is, when, but” structure of the syntax?
- * What is the relationship between the sound of the poem and its “is, when, but” structure?
- * Is the rhythm of the poem pleasing to the ear? Is there a relationship between the sound and the sense of the poem?