

John Donne
Death be not proud
More challenging questions!

Worksheet by:
Keith Tankard
Knowledge4Africa.com

"Death be not proud" is based upon the following extract from the New Testament: *"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed -- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet . . . then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting?' The sting of Death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (1 Corinthians 15:51-57)

1. "Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me."
 - Why does the poet tell Death not to be proud? (4)
 - Comment on the use of personification in this quatrain -- and, indeed, in the sonnet as a whole. (4)

2. "Thou'art slave to Fate, Chance, kings and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke. Why swell'st thou then?"
 - In what way can Death be described as being a slave? (4)
 - Why does the poet ask, "Why swell'st thou then?" (4)
 - What is meant when the poet says that "poppy or charms" make us sleep as well? (4)
 - Why is there an apostrophe in "think'st" and "swell'st"? (2)

3. "One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more. Death, thou shalt die."
 - What difference would there be if the poet had used "will" instead of "shall" -- as in "Death will be no more. Death, thou wilt die"? (4)
 - Comment on the paradox in the conclusion, "Death, thou shalt die". (4)

4. GENERAL QUESTIONS
 - This poem is clearly a sonnet but what type of sonnet? Give clear reasons for your answer. (4)
 - Why does the poet address Death with the titles "thee" and "thou"? (4)

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