

[Elizabeth Barrett Browning](#) (1806-1861) was already a famous writer when she met, then married, Robert Browning. When she was born - in [County Durham, England](#) - her parents named her Elizabeth Barrett Moulton-Barrett. She was the oldest of twelve children and was very close to her family members.

An extraordinarily intelligent child, Elizabeth studied Greek when she was ten years old. By the time she was fifteen, her poems were published in [The New Monthly Magazine](#).

Joy about her published works, however, must have been matched with sorrow over an illness which she developed at about the same age. Despite her frail health, she continued to write for the rest of her life.

[Barrett met Robert Browning](#) in 1845. A great admirer of her poetry, he'd sent her letters before they first met. They married - on September 12, 1846 - then traveled to Italy. Their hope was that warmer weather would help Elizabeth to feel better.

In 1849, the couple had a son whom they named [Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning](#). His nickname was "Pen."

[Elizabeth's health](#) continued to be an issue for her, despite the better weather in Italy. She died - at the age of 55 - on the 29th of June, 1861. She is [buried in Florence](#).

One of her most famous poems - "How Do I Love Thee?" - was first published in 1850. Elizabeth wrote it while she was dating Robert Browning. Later, it became poem number 43 in a book of 44 poems entitled [Sonnets from the Portuguese](#). (There is, parenthetically, a [story about that title](#).)

In this audio clip, Carole Bos (creator of AwesomeStories) reads the sonnet. Think about these topics as you hear the words.

ISSUES AND QUESTIONS TO PONDER: To whom is the poet speaking? Do her words equally apply to children, close friends, a spouse?

What three-dimensional terms does she use to express her love? Why does she use such words?

EBB also uses the basic needs, of living life, to describe her love. What words does she choose for that?

Why does she liken love to life's basic needs?

The poet is not obligated to love the person(s) to whom she is speaking. What words does she use to express that fact?

Loving - for the sake of love itself - is important to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Which words express that concept?

Her love doesn't change whether she's happy or sad. How does she express that?

It sounds like the poet had faith when she was a child, then lost it. Do you think - from the way she ends the poem - that she found it again?

How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and Ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right.
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.*

For Classics at AwesomeStories

Credits:

"How Do I Love Thee," by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, read by Carole Bos (creator of Awesome Stories).

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/How-Do-I-Love-Thee-Elizabeth-Barrett-Browning0>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/How-Do-I-Love-Thee-Elizabeth-Barrett-Browning0>