

Reading a Work of Art: Student Questions for *Death and the Miser*

Listed below are the questions students respond to when working with the Reading a Work of Art Online Tool.

Crucifix

1. What is the symbolic meaning of the beam of light?
2. How does the beam of light's symbolic meaning contribute to the protagonist's conflict?

Demon over the bed

1. What is the symbolic meaning of the Demon perched on top of the bed?
2. How does the demon perched on top of the bed contribute to the main conflict of this work?

Death

1. What is the symbolic meaning of the image of Death? What specific aspect of death is being communicated by this symbol?
2. Describe Death's effect on the dying Miser. What comment does this make about how Middle Age society viewed death?
3. Read Emily Dickinson's poem "Because I could not stop for Death" (712). What is the difference between Dickinson's attitude towards death in her poem and the Miser's attitude towards death in this painting?

Dying Miser

1. Identify the denotative and connotative meanings of the word *miser*.
2. Is the miser looking at Death, the demon, or the crucifix? Explain the significance of the direction in which he is looking.
3. Describe the movement of the dying Miser. What does this movement suggest about the nature of the Miser's character?
4. What is the conflict being experienced by the Miser? Identify the elements that are causing this conflict.

Demon beside the bed

1. What is the symbolic meaning of this demon's movement?
2. How does this demon contribute to the protagonist's conflict?

Angel

1. What is the symbolic meaning of the angel's movement?
2. How does the angel contribute to the protagonist's conflict?

Healthy Miser

1. What does the movement of the healthy Miser suggest about the nature of his character?
2. What are the symbolic meanings of the key and rosary? What do these symbols suggest about the nature of the Miser's character?
3. Explain how the healthy Miser's character contributes to the central conflict of this painting.

Demon beside the lockbox

1. What comment is made through the indulgence held in the hand of the demon beside the lockbox?

Knight's Armor

1. What does this armor suggest about the Miser's past?
2. How does the armor serve as a contrast to the image of the Miser dying in the bed?