

# Success is Counted Sweetest

By Emily Dickinson

Success is counted sweetest      a  
By those who ne'er succeed.      b  
To comprehend a nectar      c  
Requires sorest need.      b

Not one of all the purple Host      d  
Who took the Flag today      e  
Can tell the definition      f  
So clear of Victory      e

As he defeated--dying--      g  
On whose forbidden ear      h  
The distant strains of triumph      i  
Burst agonized and clear!      h

# Dramatic Situation

- Speaker:
  - > A person who has never succeeded
- Audience:
  - > Those who strive for success and
    - Never reach it
    - Reach it but never understand it
- Situation:
  - > People desire to succeed
  - > Success means most to those who have never succeeded
- Diction:
  - > Informal language
- Purpose:
  - > To explain that what success means is best understood by the loser

# Poetic Form

- ◉ Stanzas: Three
- ◉ Number of physical lines: Twelve
- ◉ Number of grammatical lines: Three
- ◉ Rhyme Scheme:
  - > Slant Rhyme (on text)
  - > a b c b
  - > d e f e
  - > g h i h

# Poetic Form continued

- Meter: iambic trimeter/ tetrameter

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# First Stanza

Success is counted sweetest  
By those who ne'er succeed.  
To comprehend a nectar  
Requires sorest need.

- Meaning:
  - > Success means the most to the losers
  - > To truly understand success, one must literally be starving for it
- Figures of speech:
  - > First two lines are paradox
  - > Next two lines compare nectar and success
    - Allusion to Greek mythology where nectar is drink of gods
    - Nectar is a metaphor for success/the desired object
      - Bees attracted to flowers nectars
- Sound devices:
  - > Alliteration of the "s" sound in success

# Second Stanza

Not one of all the purple Host  
Who took the Flag today  
Can tell the definition  
So clear of victory

- Meaning:

- > Not a single soldier who won that day (a single victor) can truly define victory

- Figures of speech:

- > purple Host:
  - Metonymy for a high ranking official in an army or government
- > took the Flag today
  - Metonymy for winning the battle

# Third Stanza

As he defeated-dying-  
On whose forbidden ear  
The distant strains of triumph  
Burst agonized and clear !

- Meaning:
  - > Only the defeated can truly understand the meaning of victory
- Figures of speech:
  - > Forbidden ear:
    - Lost so cannot participate in victory celebrations
    - Metaphor: the sounds of triumph are forbidden to the loser
  - > Distant strains of triumph:
    - Metaphor: victory not being part of the loser's experience
  - > Last two lines
    - Metonymy for the victory parade (sounds of drums and bugles)
    - Imagery in the reader's mind
  - > Alliteration of the "d" sound in *defeated, dying, and distant*

# Meaning

- **First:**
  - > **Only those who have never succeeded can truly understand the meaning of success**
- **Relation to other poems:**
  - > **The world according to a nobody**
    - **If winners are the ones who usually write history, Dickinson is determined to even the score a bit and let losers express their views.**
  - > **Like her other poems, it creates:**
    - **Idea of Dickinson as outsider, an eccentric, a loser in life**
  - > **Similar theme to:**
    - **I'm Nobody! Who are you?**
    - **This is my letter to the World**