

Paradox in Literature

A paradox is a contradictory statement, situation or idea. Below are quotations from literature. Explain why each is a paradox.

1) Robert Frost, "The Tuft of Flowers"
"Men work together," I told him from the heart,
"Whether they work together or apart."

2) Oscar Wilde, "Lady Windemere's Fan"
I can resist everything except temptation.

3) Emily Dickinson, "Poems, Series 2"
I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?

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A paradox is a contradictory statement, situation or idea. Below are quotations from literature. Explain why each is a paradox.

Actual student answers will vary. Answers should include references to the following:

- 1) Robert Frost, "The Tuft of Flowers"
"Men work together," I told him from the heart,
"Whether they work together or apart."

Since together and apart are opposites of each other, it seems impossible to work together and apart at the same time.

- 2) Oscar Wilde, "Lady Windemere's Fan"
I can resist everything except temptation.

If you can resist everything, then that should include temptation. Also, the only thing that humans resist is temptation, so he actually resists nothing.

- 3) Emily Dickinson, "Poems, Series 2"
I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?

She can't be nobody, since she is somebody.