

Catastrophe is Next to Godliness by Franny Choi

Introduction: *“Literature is the question minus the answer”*

- Roland Barnes

Oftentimes in literature, an author’s intent is to merely speak on a subject and let the reader draw conclusions about the meaning of the work on their own; not all poems have a clear, definitive moral or answer, and that’s the beauty of poetry. Today we’re going to read through a poem and explore the questions the work posits and the extent to which those questions are answered.

Directions: Follow the steps provided below.

1. Read “[Catastrophe is Next to Godliness](#)” by Franny Choi, paying close attention to the poetic elements and techniques the poet uses to express her complex attitude toward “catastrophe.”
2. In the left-hand column, determine one of the central “questions” that the poem posits. These questions should **not** be *your* questions about the text; they should refer to the different “questions” that arise from the poem.
3. In the middle column, provide evidence from the text that supports the reason why you think that the question you came up with is central to the text’s purpose. This section should illustrate what’s going on in the poem - both literally and figuratively - and briefly explain how the text illustrates the question the poem offers.
4. In the final column, discuss the extent to which the poem offers an answer. Again, not all poems have a clear, definitive answer provided, but there is always enough text to lead you in the direction of a deeper understanding. Your response should consist of no less than two complete sentences.

An example is provided below:

Question	Textual Evidence That Reveals or Supports Question	Extent to Which The Question is Answered <i>*Your response should consist of no less than two complete sentences.</i>
<i>Do humans necessitate some form of catastrophe or trauma in their lives to find purpose?</i>	<i>At the beginning of the poem, the speaker asserts that they “want a storm [they] can dance in,” like everybody else. The statement insinuates that it is human nature - so much so that “everybody” wants it - to crave some form of “storm,” hardship, or catastrophe to find meaning in their lives, or, at the very least, to “change” it.</i>	<i>Though the speaker doesn’t necessarily insinuate that catastrophe, in a literal sense, is something we all deserve, they do suggest that there is a certain benefit to having gone through it. The speaker recounts, “The day A. died, the sun was brighter than any sun. I answered the phone, and a channel opened between my stupid head and heaven, or what was left of it.” Through their experience with chaos (in this case, the death of a loved one), the speaker was able to receive a “gift” in compensation: one of mental and emotional clarity. The turmoil they experienced acted as a vessel between them and a higher truth, one that would not have been granted without having undergone the experience to begin with.</i>