Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



A Poison Tree

by William Blake

Grades 6–9 · Common Core RL.7.4, RL.7.2, RL.7.5

"A Poison Tree" appeared in Songs of Experience (1794); Blake first called it "Christian Forbearance." It has four four-line stanzas in rhyming couplets. The apple and the garden recall the story of Adam and Eve. The whole poem is an extended metaphor.

THE POEM

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears
Night and morning with my tears,
And I sunnèd it with smiles
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright,
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,—

And into my garden stole
When the night had veiled the pole;
In the morning, glad, I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

VOCABULARY

wrath — great anger

foe — an enemy

deceitful — dishonest, misleading

wiles — clever tricks

beheld — saw

stole — here, crept in secretly

veiled — covered, hidden

pole — the night sky (the pole star)

outstretched — stretched out, lying flat

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between how the speaker handles anger toward his friend and toward his foe?

2. How does the speaker "water" and "sun" his anger?

3. What does the anger finally produce?

4. Why does the foe sneak into the garden?

5. How does the speaker feel at the end? What lesson does the poem teach?

WRITING PROMPT

Choose a feeling (jealousy, worry, kindness). Write a poem of 3–4 stanzas comparing it to something that grows, showing what feeds it and what it becomes.

A Poison Tree — Answer Key

1. With his friend, he “told my wrath, my wrath did end”; with his foe, he “told it not, my wrath did grow.”
2. He waters it “in fears / Night and morning with my tears,” and suns it “with smiles / And with soft deceitful wiles”: fear, self-pity and fake friendliness keep it alive.
3. “an apple bright,” a tempting poisoned fruit.
4. He sees the apple “shine” and knows “it was mine,” so he wants to take it.
5. He is “glad” to see his foe “outstretched beneath the tree” (dead). The lesson: hidden anger grows into something deadly; it is better to speak about it.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/a-poison-tree-william-blake/