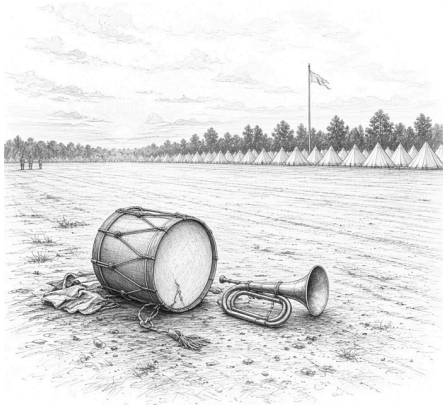
Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



Danny Deever

by Rudyard Kipling

Grades 9–12 · Common Core RL.9-10.5, RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.3

"Danny Deever" was published in 1890 and collected in Barrack-Room Ballads (1892). It is a ballad told almost entirely as dialogue between a young soldier (Files-on-Parade) and an older Colour-Sergeant, with a refrain ending "in the mornin'". Danny is executed for shooting a comrade in his sleep.

THE POEM

"What are the bugles blowin' for?" said Files-on-Parade.

"To turn you out, to turn you out", the Colour-Sergeant said.

"What makes you look so white, so white?" said Files-on-Parade.

"I'm dreadin' what I've got to watch", the Colour-Sergeant said.

For they're hangin' Danny Deever, you can hear the Dead March play,
The regiment's in 'ollow square—they're hangin' him today;
They've taken of his buttons off an' cut his stripes away,
An' they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'.

"What makes the rear-rank breathe so 'ard?" said Files-on-Parade.

"It's bitter cold, it's bitter cold", the Colour-Sergeant said.

"What makes that front-rank man fall down?" said Files-on-Parade.

"A touch o' sun, a touch o' sun", the Colour-Sergeant said.

They are hangin' Danny Deever, they are marchin' of 'im round,
They 'ave 'alted Danny Deever by 'is coffin on the ground;
An' 'e'll swing in 'arf a minute for a sneakin' shootin' hound—
O they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'!

"'Is cot was right-'and cot to mine", said Files-on-Parade.

"'E's sleepin' out an' far tonight", the Colour-Sergeant said.

"I've drunk 'is beer a score o' times", said Files-on-Parade.

"'E's drinkin' bitter beer alone", the Colour-Sergeant said.

They are hangin' Danny Deever, you must mark 'im to 'is place,
For 'e shot a comrade sleepin'—you must look 'im in the face;
Nine 'undred of 'is county an' the regiment's disgrace,
While they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'.

"What's that so black agin' the sun?" said Files-on-Parade.

"It's Danny fightin' 'ard for life", the Colour-Sergeant said.

"What's that that whimpers over'ead?" said Files-on-Parade.

"It's Danny's soul that's passin' now", the Colour-Sergeant said.

For they're done with Danny Deever, you can 'ear the quickstep play,
The regiment's in column, an' they're marchin' us away;
Ho! the young recruits are shakin', an' they'll want their beer today,
After hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'.

VOCABULARY

bugles — brass horns used to give army signals

Dead March — a funeral march

'ollow square — a hollow square formation of troops

stripes — badges of rank on a uniform

comrade — fellow soldier

disgrace — shame

quickstep — a fast marching tune

recruits — new soldiers

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who are the two speakers, and how are their attitudes different?

2. What crime did Danny commit? Quote the line.

3. Why does the Colour-Sergeant say the men "must look 'im in the face"?

4. What does "What's that so black agin' the sun?" describe?

5. How does the final stanza's change from "hangin'" to "done with" affect the mood?

WRITING PROMPT

Write a diary entry from Files-on-Parade on the night after the hanging.

Danny Deever — Answer Key

1. Files-on-Parade, a young soldier, asks nervous questions; the Colour-Sergeant gives brief, controlled answers while hiding his own dread.
2. “For ‘e shot a comrade sleepin’”.
3. The execution is a lesson and warning to the regiment; they must witness it.
4. Danny’s body struggling on the gallows (“It’s Danny fightin’ ‘ard for life”).
5. It is over; the regiment marches off to a quickstep, but “the young recruits are shakin’”, leaving a mood of shock and grim routine.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/danny-deever-rudyard-kipling/