Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



The Snow

by Emily Dickinson

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

Dickinson wrote the poem around 1862; it was published after her death in Poems (1891) under the title "The Snow." It is a riddle poem: the subject is only called "It." Our version has five four-line stanzas, packed with metaphors from sewing, cooking and clothing.

THE POEM

It sifts from leaden sieves,
It powders all the wood,
It fills with alabaster wool
The wrinkles of the road.

It makes an even face
Of mountain and of plain, --
Unbroken forehead from the east
Unto the east again.

It reaches to the fence,
It wraps it, rail by rail,
Till it is lost in fleeces;
It flings a crystal veil

On stump and stack and stem, --
The summer's empty room,
Acres of seams where harvests were,
Recordless, but for them.

It ruffles wrists of posts,
As ankles of a queen, --
Then stills its artisans like ghosts,
Denying they have been.

VOCABULARY

sifts — shakes through a sieve so only fine bits fall

leaden — dull gray, like lead

sieves — kitchen strainers with fine mesh

alabaster — a smooth white stone

fleeces — sheep's wool coats

stack — a pile of hay or grain

recordless — leaving no record or trace

artisans — skilled craftworkers

denying — saying something is not true

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The poem never names what it describes. What clues tell you what "It" is?

2. What is being compared to "leaden sieves"? Why is "leaden" a good color word here?

3. What does the snow do to "The wrinkles of the road" and to "mountain and of plain"?

4. What is "The summer's empty room"?

5. In the last stanza, the snow "stills its artisans like ghosts." What happens when the snowfall stops?

WRITING PROMPT

Write a riddle poem about a kind of weather. Call it only "It" and describe what it does to five different things, using at least two metaphors.

The Snow — Answer Key

1. It falls from the sky, “powders all the wood,” is white like “alabaster wool,” and covers fences “rail by rail” in a “crystal veil.”
2. The gray winter clouds. “Leaden” captures their heavy gray color as the snow sifts down like flour.
3. It fills the ruts with “alabaster wool” and makes “an even face” of mountain and plain, smoothing everything into one white surface.
4. The bare, harvested fields: “Acres of seams where harvests were,” now empty, with only stumps and stacks to show what was there.
5. The flakes (the “artisans” that did all the work) stop and vanish “like ghosts, / Denying they have been”: the snow lies still, as if no one made it.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/the-snow-emily-dickinson/