Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



Snow-Flakes

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Grades 8–10 · Common Core RL.8.4, RL.8.2, RL.8.5

"Snow-Flakes" is a short winter poem of 18 lines in three six-line stanzas. Each stanza rhymes ABABCC, and the last two lines of each are much shorter, so the poem seems to slow down and settle, like snow reaching the ground. Longfellow uses personification, treating the Air and the sky as if they had garments, faces and feelings. Look for how he links the weather outside with the feelings inside a person.

THE POEM

Out of the bosom of the Air,
Out of the cloud-folds of her garments shaken,
Over the woodlands brown and bare,
Over the harvest-fields forsaken,
Silent, and soft, and slow
Descends the snow.

Even as our cloudy fancies take
Suddenly shape in some divine expression,
Even as the troubled heart doth make
In the white countenance confession,
The troubled sky reveals
The grief it feels.

This is the poem of the air,
Slowly in silent syllables recorded;
This is the secret of despair,
Long in its cloudy bosom hoarded,
Now whispered and revealed
To wood and field.

VOCABULARY

bosom — chest; the heart or inner part

cloud-folds — the folds or layers of clouds

forsaken — abandoned; left empty

fancies — imaginative thoughts

divine — godlike; wonderful

countenance — face

confession — telling of a secret or feeling

recorded — written down

syllables — units of sound in a word

hoarded — saved up and hidden away

despair — complete loss of hope

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The poem opens with “Out of the bosom of the Air, / Out of the cloud-folds of her garments shaken.” What is being personified, and what picture of snowfall does this create?

2. Lines 3–4 describe the places the snow falls: “the woodlands brown and bare” and “the harvest-fields forsaken.” What season and mood do these details suggest?

3. Look at the line “Silent, and soft, and slow / Descends the snow.” How do the sounds, the repeated s sounds and the shorter lines, help you hear and see the snow?

4. In stanza 2 Longfellow says the snow is “Even as” a person’s face showing feeling: “Even as the troubled heart doth make / In the white countenance confession.” What two things is he comparing, and what does the sky “confess”?

5. In stanza 3 the snow becomes “the poem of the air” and “the secret of despair.” Why might a poet picture snow as writing, and how do the last lines, “Now whispered and revealed / To wood and field,” change the way we see something quiet and plain?

WRITING PROMPT

Choose a kind of weather (rain, fog, wind, heat, thunder) and write a short poem or paragraph in which it expresses a feeling, as if the sky were confessing it. Use personification, and end with two short lines like Longfellow’s.

Snow-Flakes — Answer Key

1. The Air is personified as a woman who shakes snow out of "the cloud-folds of her garments," like someone shaking a cloak or blanket. The snow seems to fall from her clothing, so snowfall feels gentle and almost alive.
2. "Woodlands brown and bare" and "harvest-fields forsaken" suggest late autumn turning to winter: the crops are in, the trees are bare, and the land seems empty. The mood is quiet, lonely and a little sad.
3. "Silent, and soft, and slow" repeats soft s sounds and has a gentle, slowing rhythm, and the short last lines of each stanza, like "Descends the snow," make the poem settle as it ends. The sound of the words copies the way the snow quietly drifts down.
4. He compares how our "cloudy fancies" or unclear feelings take shape in a clear "divine expression" with how a "troubled heart" shows its feeling on a pale face. The sky does the same thing: the "troubled sky reveals / The grief it feels," meaning the snow is the sky's visible sadness.
5. Snow covers the ground in tiny pieces, like letters on a page, so the poet calls it a "poem of the air" written "in silent syllables." The sky has held its "secret of despair" in its "cloudy bosom," and now it is "whispered and revealed / To wood and field." Something quiet and plain is shown to carry a hidden emotion.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/snow-flakes-henry-wadsworth-longfellow/