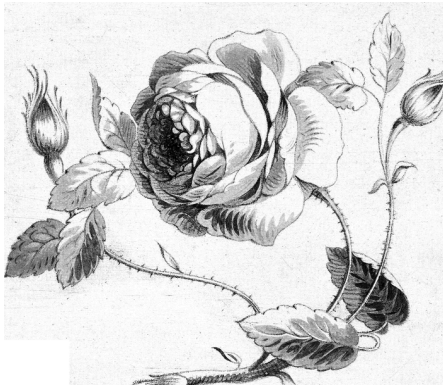
Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



The Sick Rose

by William Blake

Grades 8–11 · Common Core RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.5

"The Sick Rose" appeared in Songs of Experience (1794). Blake's illustration shows a drooping rose with a worm entering it. The poem has two four-line stanzas of short, two-beat lines. Its symbols are open: readers have seen the worm as disease, jealousy, secrecy or a corrupting love.

THE POEM

O rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

VOCABULARY

thou art — you are

invisible — unable to be seen

howling — making a long, loud cry

crimson — deep red

secret — hidden

destroy — ruin completely

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is the speaker talking to? What is the name for this device?

2. Describe the worm. Which details make it seem dangerous?

3. Where does the worm find the rose, and what is the rose's bed like?

4. Why might the worm's love be called "dark" and "secret"?

5. What could the rose and the worm be symbols for? Give two possible readings.

WRITING PROMPT

Write an eight-line poem addressed to an object in nature that is being harmed by something hidden. Leave the meaning open, as Blake does.

The Sick Rose — Answer Key

1. The rose; speaking to something that cannot answer is apostrophe.
2. It is “invisible,” “flies in the night, / In the howling storm,” hidden and violent.
3. In its “bed / Of crimson joy,” the rich red heart of the flower.
4. It is hidden and harmful: it pretends to be love but “Does thy life destroy.”
5. Accept two supported readings, e.g. beauty destroyed by disease; innocence corrupted by experience; love poisoned by jealousy or secrecy.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/the-sick-rose-william-blake/