Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



Woods in Winter

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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

"Woods in Winter" has 28 lines in seven four-line stanzas, and each stanza rhymes ABAB. The first four stanzas describe the winter scene, then the speaker turns in line 17 with "Alas! how changed from the fair scene" to remember summer. In line 21 another turn begins with "But still wild music is abroad." As you read, notice how the poem moves from loneliness toward comfort, and where Longfellow uses sound and personification.

THE POEM

When winter winds are piercing chill,
And through the hawthorn blows the gale,
With solemn feet I tread the hill,
That overbrows the lonely vale.

O'er the bare upland, and away
Through the long reach of desert woods,
The embracing sunbeams chastely play,
And gladden these deep solitudes.

Where, twisted round the barren oak,
The summer vine in beauty clung,
And summer winds the stillness broke,
The crystal icicle is hung.

Where, from their frozen urns, mute springs
Pour out the river's gradual tide,
Shrilly the skater's iron rings,
And voices fill the woodland side.

Alas! how changed from the fair scene,
When birds sang out their mellow lay,
And winds were soft, and woods were green,
And the song ceased not with the day!

But still wild music is abroad,
Pale, desert woods! within your crowd;
And gathering winds, in hoarse accord,
Amid the vocal reeds pipe loud.

Chill airs and wintry winds! my ear
Has grown familiar with your song;
I hear it in the opening year,
I listen, and it cheers me long.

VOCABULARY

hawthorn — a thorny shrub or small tree

overbrows — hangs over like an eyebrow

vale — valley

upland — high ground

chastely — purely; simply

solitudes — lonely, quiet places

urns — vases or jars; here, frozen containers of water

shrilly — in a sharp, high sound

lay — song

accord — harmony; agreement

vocal — able to make sound; full of voices

desert — wild and empty (pronounced DEZ-ert)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the first stanza, how does the speaker feel, and what details such as “winds are piercing chill” and “With solemn feet I tread the hill” show it?

2. Stanzas 2 and 3 contrast two sights. What details in “The embracing sunbeams chastely play” and “The crystal icicle is hung” show winter, and what picture of summer do you get from “The summer vine in beauty clung”?

3. In lines 13–16, what do the “frozen urns” and “mute springs” mean, and what sounds does the speaker still hear on the ice?

4. Stanza 5 begins with “Alas! how changed from the fair scene.” What does the speaker remember, and what turn happens at line 21 with “But still wild music is abroad”?

5. By the end, the speaker says “my ear / Has grown familiar with your song” and “I listen, and it cheers me long.” How has the speaker’s feeling about winter changed from the first stanza?

WRITING PROMPT

Describe a place you know well in a season that is the opposite of your favorite. Like Longfellow, notice at least two sounds in the scene and include one line that begins with a turn such as “But still…”

Woods in Winter — Answer Key

1. The speaker seems solemn and alone but determined: the winds are “piercing chill,” the gale blows “through the hawthorn,” and he walks “With solemn feet” up a hill that “overbrows the lonely vale.” The cold and the slow, serious steps give a lonely, quiet mood.

2. Winter shows in the bare upland, the “desert woods,” and the “crystal icicle.” The sunbeams “chastely play” and “gladden these deep solitudes,” so there is still some cheer. The “summer vine in beauty clung” to the oak, and “summer winds the stillness broke,” picturing a living, noisy summer that is now gone.

3. The springs are “mute” and held in “frozen urns” because water has frozen. But the springs still pour out the river’s tide, and on the ice “Shrilly the skater’s iron rings, / And voices fill the woodland side.” Human sounds and laughter replace the sounds of summer.

4. The speaker remembers when “birds sang out their mellow lay, / And winds were soft, and woods were green.” At line 21 the poem turns: instead of mourning summer, he hears “wild music” in the “gathering winds” and “vocal reeds” that “pipe loud.”

5. At first he walks with “solemn feet” through a chilly, lonely scene. By the end he has learned to love the winter sounds: the winds’ “song” no longer feels strange, and listening “cheers me long.” The poem moves from sadness over what is lost to comfort in what is still there.

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/woods-in-winter-henry-wadsworth-longfellow/