

RAISING ACHIEVEMENT • UNSEEN POETRY • DRILL 1

A narrow fellow in the grass

Nature

Today: how the poet presents the speaker's feelings about the snake

25 minutes

Do Now

Know

- 1 Why do we write 'the speaker' about the voice in a poem, and not 'the poet'?
- 2 What does question 28.1 ask you to write about?
- 3 Which two assessment objectives are marked in question 28.1?
- 4 What is a euphemism?
- 5 What is a quatrain?

Do Now: answers

Know

1

Why do we write 'the speaker' about the voice in a poem, and not 'the poet'?

The voice may be an invented character, so we cannot assume it is the poet.

2

What does question 28.1 ask you to write about?

One poem you have not seen before: how the poet presents a feeling, idea or person named in the question.

3

Which two assessment objectives are marked in question 28.1?

AO1 (your response, backed by quotations) and AO2 (language, form and structure).

4

What is a euphemism?

A mild or indirect word used in place of a blunt one, such as 'passed away' for 'died'.

5

What is a quatrain?

A stanza of four lines.

Focus reminder

Know

What Question 28.1 asks you to do

Read the poem twice: first for what happens and who speaks, then for how it makes you feel.

Answer the focus in the question. Write 'the poet presents' and 'the speaker'.

Name a method and explain its effect: imagery, sound, form or structure.

Context earns no marks here, so spend your time on the words.

A narrow fellow in the grass (1 of 3)

[Read](#)

Emily Dickinson · 1830–1886 · Project Gutenberg #12242, Poems by Emily Dickinson, Second Series

- 1 A narrow fellow in the grass
Occasionally rides;
You may have met him, — did you not,
His notice sudden is.
- 5 The grass divides as with a comb,
A spotted shaft is seen;
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on.

A narrow fellow in the grass (2 of 3)

Read

He likes a boggy acre,
10 A floor too cool for corn.
Yet when a child, and barefoot,
I more than once, at morn,

Have passed, I thought, a whip-lash
Unbraiding in the sun, —
15 When, stooping to secure it,
It wrinkled, and was gone.

A narrow fellow in the grass (3 of 3)

Read

Several of nature's people
I know, and they know me;
I feel for them a transport
20 Of cordiality;

But never met this fellow,
Attended or alone,
Without a tighter breathing,
And zero at the bone.

Check your understanding

Know

- 1 What is the “narrow fellow”?
- 2 Where does the snake like to live?
- 3 What did the speaker think the snake was when they were a child?
- 4 How does the speaker feel whenever they meet the snake?

Check your understanding: answers

Know

1

What is the “narrow fellow”?

A snake. The poet never names it.

2

Where does the snake like to live?

In “a boggy acre”: cool, wet ground.

3

What did the speaker think the snake was when they were a child?

A “whip-lash” lying in the sun.

4

How does the speaker feel whenever they meet the snake?

Frightened: they feel “a tighter breathing” and “zero at the bone”.

Quotation explosion

Apply

"Without a tighter breathing, And zero at the bone."

Copy the quotation into the middle of your page. Explode it: answer each question around it.

Explode it

Apply

AO1

What feeling does this ending show, and how is it different from stanza 5?

AO2

What does the phrase “zero at the bone” suggest?

AO2

Why does the poet save this image for the very last line?

Explosion: answers

Apply

AO1

What feeling does this ending show, and how is it different from stanza 5?

Fear. In stanza 5 the speaker feels warm “cordiality” towards “nature’s people”, but the snake always brings a cold shock.

AO2

What does the phrase “zero at the bone” suggest?

A cold that reaches the skeleton: fear felt in the body, deeper than the skin. “zero” also suggests nothing, as if the speaker is emptied out.

AO2

Why does the poet save this image for the very last line?

The poem opens in a light, chatty tone (“did you not”), so the last line is a sudden drop, like the snake’s “notice sudden”. The reader feels the shock with the speaker.

Naming a method: personification

Technique

Personification gives human qualities to something that is not human. Name it, quote it, then say what it makes the reader think or feel.

A narrow fellow in the grass

Your task Write one sentence explaining what calling the snake a “fellow” suggests about the speaker’s attitude at the start of the poem.

The question

Plan

Question 28.1

In 'A narrow fellow in the grass', how does the poet present the speaker's feelings about the snake?

Today: plan your answer. No essay. About 8 minutes.

Plan it

Plan

Plan

1. Today: plan your answer in 8 minutes. No essay.
2. Write a one-sentence thesis: how does the speaker feel about the snake, and does the feeling change?
3. Plan three points in poem order: the friendly opening, the childhood memory, the frightened ending. Add a quotation and a method to each.
4. For each point, note one effect on the reader.

Top tips

- Write 'the speaker', since the voice may not be the poet.
- Use short quotations: two to five words are enough.
- Look for the gap between the polite words and the fear underneath them.

Your turn

8 minutes

Today: plan your answer in 8 minutes. No essay.

Model plan

Master

Thesis: The speaker describes the snake in polite, almost friendly language, but the poem shows a fear underneath the politeness that the speaker cannot control.

Point 1 (opening): personification of the snake as a “narrow fellow” who “rides”, and the chatty question “did you not”, make him sound like a gentleman caller, so the reader is drawn in.

Point 2 (middle): the childhood memory. The metaphor of a “whip-lash” that “wrinkled, and was gone” shows a creature that is hard to see and quick, so the danger is never fixed.

Point 3 (ending): the contrast between “cordiality” towards “nature’s people” and the bodily fear of “a tighter breathing, And zero at the bone”. The last line drops the polite tone.

Order: follow the poem from start to end so the change from politeness to fear is clear.

Have a go

Practise

Look again at stanzas 3 and 4. Answer in two or three sentences.

How does the poet use the speaker's childhood memory to make the snake seem impossible to catch? Use one quotation.

Green pen

Check your work and improve it in green pen.



My thesis answers the question in one sentence.



Each point has a short quotation and a named method.



I said what each method makes the reader feel or think.



My plan follows the poem through to its ending.