



A narrow Fellow in the Grass

Emily Dickinson
Poem 986

This was one of the few poems published during Dickinson's lifetime with the title 'The Snake'. It expresses the poet's fascination with nature even if it is written in the persona of a man.

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| <p>A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides¹ –
You may have met Him – did you not²
His notice sudden is³ –</p> <p>5 The Grass divides as with a Comb⁴ –
A spotted shaft⁵ is seen –
And then it closes at your feet
And opens farther on –</p> <p>10 He likes a Boggy Acre⁶
A Floor too cool for Corn –
Yet when a Boy, and Barefoot⁷ –
I more than once at Noon</p> | <p>Have passed, I thought, a Whip lash⁸
Unbraiding⁹ in the Sun
15 When stooping to secure it¹⁰
It wrinkled¹¹, and was gone –</p> <p>Several of Nature's People
I know, and they know me –
I feel for them a transport
20 Of cordiality –</p> <p>But never met this Fellow
Attended¹², or alone
Without a tighter breathing¹³
And Zero at the Bone¹⁴ –</p> |
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1 rides. Si muove.

2 did you not. O forse no.

3 His notice sudden is. Si annuncia all'improvviso.

4 Comb. Pettine.

5 spotted shaft. Asta maculata.

6 Boggy Acre. Terreno palustre.

7 Barefoot. A piedi nudi.

8 Whip lash. Frusta.

9 Unbraiding. Che si snodava.

10 When ... it. Quando mi chinavo a prenderla.

11 It wrinkled. Si raggrinziva.

12 Attended. In compagnia.

13 tighter breathing. Respiro più affannoso.

14 Zero at the Bone. Zero nelle ossa.

VISUAL ANALYSIS

1 READ the poem and write down the main idea in each stanza.

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| • Stanza 1 | • Stanza 4 |
| • Stanza 2 | • Stanza 5 |
| • Stanza 3 | • Stanza 6 |

2 SUGGEST possible titles for the poem, supporting your choice with references to the text.

3 LOOK at the visual analysis of the text and write down what each highlight and colour represents.

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4 DISCUSS the following questions in pairs.

- Consider the expressions which describe the snake. How is it connoted?
- What is the meaning of the tense shift in the fourth stanza?
- Define the poet's attitude towards nature.
- Focus on the last, celebrated line of the poem. Discuss the way the poet combines abstract and concrete, and the effect this produces.

COMPETENCE: LINKING LITERATURE TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

5 DISCUSS. Do you generally associate nature and its creatures with feelings of pleasure or fear? As you discuss this issue provide some examples from your personal experience.