

9th Grade Lit/Comp – Rumfelt
Poetry Analysis

To do this activity, you will need a copy of the poem “Desert Places” by Robert Frost. Read the poem (on the back of this sheet) and then answer the questions below.

VOCABULARY: Use the dictionary to define these words before trying to analyze the poems: *lair*, *benighted*.

lair: _____

benighted: _____

1. Look carefully at the first line of the poem.
 - a. What four words in this line use alliteration (the same sound at the beginning of the word)?
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 - b. Say these four words aloud together several times. What feeling or mental picture do you experience as you say them? _____
2. The scene in the poem is a field in winter. Several forces of nature are combining to smother or choke off this field. Name some things that the poet tells us are either covering or encircling the field.

3. Winter is a traditional symbol for old age. Some phrases the poet uses in the second and third stanzas imply that he is, in fact, thinking of his own old age when he describes this winter scene. Locate and copy one of these descriptive phrases that might apply to an elderly person.

4. Snow is traditionally a symbol for death. What words or phrases in “Desert Places” hint at a similarity between the heavy snowfall and the arrival of death? (Find at least 2 examples)

5. The snow is falling on the field fast; only a few weeds and stubble are still showing. What might the field stand for in this poem? _____
6. What might the weeds and stubble stand for? _____
7. We usually think of a desert place as a hot, arid land filled with sand. Yet literally a desert place is any place that is *deserted* – *empty of life*. The poet says he is not frightened of the lonely spaces between stars, for he has his own “desert places.” What does Frost mean when he talks about “desert places”?

8. Based upon your analysis, what is the theme of this poem?

Desert Places

by Robert Frost (1874-1963)

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it - it is theirs.
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent-spirited to count;
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is, that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less -
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars - on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places