My Shadow

By Robert Louis Stevenson

I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed.

The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow-
Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow;
For he sometimes shoots up taller like an india-rubber ball,
And he sometimes gets so little that there's none of him at all.

He hasn't got a notion of how children ought to play,
And can only make a fool of me in every sort of way.
He stays so close beside me, he's a coward you can see;
I'd think shame to stick to nursie as that shadow sticks to me!

One morning, very early, before the sun was up,
I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup;
But my lazy little shadow, like an arrant sleepy-head,
Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed.

LEVEL 3

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Answer in full sentences.

1. Who is 'he' in the poem?

2. What do we call the device we use to give human characteristics to something that isn't human? Can you find three examples of this in the poem?

3. How many rhyming couplets are there in the poem?

4. How does the narrator describe how children grow?

5. Why is the way the shadow grows 'not at all like proper children'?

6. What do you think the word 'notion' means on line 9?

7. Use the text to help explain what a coward is. How do you know?

8. Who does the narrator mean when using the word 'nursie'?

9. Does the language in the poem indicate that this is an old or modern poem? Give three examples to back up your answer.

10. In the final verse, which line gives the scientific reason as to why the narrator can't see their shadow when they go outside? Explain your choice.

LEVEL 3

My Shadow By Robert Louis Stevenson **Answers**

1. Who is 'he' in the poem?

   In the poem, 'he' is the child's shadow.

2. What do we call the device we use to give human characteristics to something that isn't human? Can you find three example of this in the poem?

   The device we use to give human characteristics to something that isn't human is called personification.

   Answer may include: 'He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;'

   'And I see him jump before me...'

   'The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow'

   'For he sometimes shoots up taller...'

   'And he sometimes gets so little that there's none of him at all'

   'He hasn't got a notion of how children ought to play,'

   '...can only make a fool of me...'

   'He stays so close beside me, he's a coward you can see;'

   '...like an arrant sleepy-head,'

   'Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed.'

3. How many rhyming couplets are there in the poem?

   There are eight rhyming couplets in the poem.

4. How does the narrator describe how children grow?

   The narrator describes children growing as 'always very slow'.

5. Why is the way the shadow grows 'not at all like proper children'?

   The way the shadow grows is not like proper children because proper children grow very slowly, whereas the shadow sometimes 'shoots up taller' or 'gets so little that there's none of him at all'. This is because when the sun is high in the sky, your shadow appears shorter and when the sun is low in the sky, your shadow is longer.

6. What do you think the word 'notion' means on line 9?

   Notion means 'clue' or 'idea'.

7. Use the text to help explain what a coward is. How do you know?

   A coward is someone who lacks courage. We know this because the shadow stays close beside the child, who says they'd think "shame" to stick to their nurse (childminder or guardian) in the same way.

   The narrator says, 'He stays so close beside me, he's a coward you can see;'. They think the shadow is scared and hiding behind them.

8. Who does the narrator mean when using the word 'nursie'?

   When using the word 'nursie', the narrator is referring to someone who takes care of a child, like a nanny or a babysitter.

9. Does the language in the poem indicate that this is an old or modern poem? Give three examples to back up your answer.

   Various answers which suggest that the language is old rather than modern, e.g. words such as notion, arrant, ought, india-rubber ball and nursie suggest the poem is old as these words aren't commonly used today.

10. In the final verse, which line gives the scientific reason as to why the narrator can't see their shadow when they go outside? Explain your choice.

   'One morning, very early, before the sun was up,'

   The narrator couldn't see their shadow because it was still dark, leading them to believe that the lazy shadow had stayed in bed.