MY SHADOW

1st stanza:
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.

2nd stanza:
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.

3rd stanza:
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!

4th stanza:
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,
He stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed.

- Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894).
Scottish essayist, novelist, poet.
A Child’s Graden Of Verses.
Questions About The Poem, “MY SHADOW”:

1\textsuperscript{st} stanza:

1. Where does the shadow go and with whom? (Read the line 1.)

2. Does the person in the poem think the shadow is important? (Read line 2.)

3. What happens when the person in the poem jumps on the bed? (Read line 4.)

2\textsuperscript{nd} stanza:

1. What is the funniest thing about the shadow? (Read line 1.)


3.a. How does the shadow grow? When the shadow shoots up tall, what is it like? (Read line 3.) 3.b. When it is small, what is it like? (Read line 4.)

3\textsuperscript{rd} stanza:

1. Does the shadow know how children ought to play? (Read line 1.)

2. Who does the shadow stick close to and seem like? (Read line 3.)

3. How would the person in the poem feel about sticking close to his nurse the way his shadow does? (Read line 4.)

4\textsuperscript{th} stanza:

1. What happened to the shadow before the sun was up? (Read the 4\textsuperscript{th} stanza.)
General Questions About The Poem, “MY SHADOW”:

1. Have you ever seen your shadow? When? Where?
2. What does “arrant” mean? (Line 3, 4th stanza.) (See definitions, p. 4.)
3. What is a notion? (Line 1, 3rd stanza.) (See definitions, p. 5.)
4. Who is “nursie”? (Line 4, 3rd stanza.) (See definitions, p. 5.)
5. What is a “couplet,” “stanza,” & “quatrain”? (See definitions, pp. 4 & 5.)

Activities: 1. Illustrate the poem. 2. Write a story about a shadow.

Rhyming words: 8 rhyming closed couplets. See poem.
1st stanza: (lines 1 & 2) me, see; (lines 3 & 4) head, bed.
2nd stanza: (lines 1 & 2) grow, slow; (lines 3 & 4) ball, all.
3rd stanza: (lines 1 & 2) play, way; (lines 3 & 4) see, me.
4th stanza: (lines 1 & 2) up, buttercup; (lines 3 & 4) head, bed.

Rhyme pattern: 4 quatrains containing 2 rhyming closed couplets
in each stanza. 1st stanza: aabb; 2nd stanza: ccdd; 3rd stanza: eeff;
4th stanza: gghh. Lines 1 & 2 rhyme and lines 3 & 4 rhyme in each stanza.
Examples: 1st stanza: me (a), see (a), head (b), bed (b). 2nd stanza:
grow (c), slow (c), ball (d), all (d). See rhyming words above. See poem.

Syllables: The lines in the poem vary from the one 13-syllable line (line 1,
4th stanza) to 14 or 15 syllables per line. Read the poem to get the rhythm.
Examples: 1st stanza – 14/14/15/15; 2nd stanza – 14/15/15/15; 3rd stanza – 
14/15/14/15; 4th stanza – 13/14/15/14. See “syllables,” p. 5; “Meter,” p. 4,
& “meter,” p. 5.
Directions. Print out. Read the poem. Review the meter in the poem. Study the definitions.

**MY SHADOW**

1st stanza:

I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me, a 14
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see. a 14
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head; b 15
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed. b 15

Iambic.

/ / / / / / / / / (line 1; 7 iambs.) / / / / / / / / / (line 3; 7 iambs.)
/ / / / / / / / / (line 2; 7 iambs.) / / / / / / / / / (line 4; 7 iambs.)

Definitions From The Poem, “MY SHADOW”:

**arrant** – adj. Notorious in a way that is disapproved of; well-known. (Line 3, 4th stanza.)

**couplet** – n. Two lines of verse that form a unit alone or as part of a poem, especially two that rhyme and have the same meter. Some are open and some are closed. See poem. *Example of two closed couplets from the poem, “My Shadow:”* (Lines 1 & 2 rhyme and lines 3 & 4 rhyme.)
Directions. Print out. Read the poem. Continue studying the definitions.
Check your answers.

Definitions From The Poem, “MY SHADOW” cont’d:

iamb – n. A metrical foot in poetry, consisting of one short or unstressed syllable or group followed by one long stressed syllable, for example, the word “today” has one iamb ( . / ). Also called iambus and iambic. See “Meter,” p.4 and “meter” p.5.

iambic – n. Relating or consisting of iambs. See “iamb.”


notion – n. 1. An idea, opinion, concept. 2. A vague understanding or impression. (Line 1, 3rd stanza.)

nurse – nursie – n. A person’s nurse, caretaker, or babysitter. Robert Louis Stevenson had a nurse nicknamed “Cummie.” Her name was Alison Cunningham and he dedicated “A Child’s Garden of Verses” to her, “My second mother, my first wife.” (Line 4, 3rd stanza.)

quatrain – n. Any stanza unit of 4 lines, whether rhymed or unrhymed. The quatrain is the most common stanza form in English poetry. See example under “couplet,” p. 4. See poem.

stanza – n. A number of lines of verse forming a separate unit within a poem. See example under “couplet,” p. 4. See poem.

syllable – n. syllables – n.pl. 1. A unit of spoken language that consists of one or more vowel sounds alone, a syllabic consonant alone, or any of these with one or more consonant sounds. 2. One or more letters in a word that roughly correspond to a syllable of spoken language. Syllables are accented or unaccented in words or parts of words. See “Syllables,” p. 3; “Meter,” p. 4 & “meter,” p. 5. See poem.
Answers To Questions About The Poem, “MY SHADOW”:

1st stanza:
1. The shadow goes in and out with the person in the poem. (Line 1.)
2. No, he does not see of what use the shadow is. (Line 2.)
3. He sees the shadow jump before him. (Line 4.)

2nd stanza:
1. The way he grows. (Line 1.)
2.a. No; 2.b. Slow. (Line 2.)
3.a. An India-rubber ball (balls bounce high) (Line 3.); 3.b. None of him at all. (Line 4.)

Note: Shadows can vary in size from almost nothing to very big.

3rd stanza:
1. No, he hasn’t a notion or idea. (Line 1.)
2. He stays so close to the person in the poem he seems like a coward. (Line 3.)
3. He’d feel ashamed. ((Line 4.)

4th stanza:
1. It could not be seen, unavailable like someone home in bed sleeping. (Line 4.)

General Answers About The Poem, “MY SHADOW”:

1. You have to answer this question.

2-5. See definitions for “arrant” & “couplet” (p. 4); “notion,” “nursie,” “quatrain,” & “stanza” (p. 5).
Blank Lined Poetry Answer Form. Directions: Print out.