

Details of text extracts:

Text 1

Text: *Cider with Rosie*
Author: Laurie Lee (1959)

Text 2

Text: *A Child's Christmas in Wales*
Author: Dylan Thomas (1950)

Text 1

This is an abridged and adapted extract from Laurie Lee's novel, Cider with Rosie, published in 1959, which describes his childhood. Here the narrator is describing a winter's day when he, his brothers and the village boys go out to play.

Winter was no more typical of our valley than summer. It was not even summer's opposite; it was merely that other place. And somehow one never remembered the journey towards it; one arrived, and winter was here. The day came suddenly when all details were different and the village had to be rediscovered. One's nose went dead so that it hurt to breathe, and there were jigsaws of frost on the window. The light filled the house with a green polar glow; while outside – in the invisible world – there was a strange hard silence, or a metallic creaking, a faint throbbing of twigs and wires. 5

The kitchen that morning would be full of steam, billowing from kettles and pots. The outside pump was frozen again, making a sound like broken crockery, so that the girls tore icicles from the edge of the roof for water and we drank boiled ice in our tea. 10

'It's wicked,' said Mother. 'The poor, poor birds.' And she flapped her arms with vigour.

She and the girls were wrapped in all they had, coats and scarves and mittens; some had the shivers and some drops on their noses, while poor little Phyllis sat rocking in a chair holding her sore feet like a handful of bees.

'The poor, poor birds,' Mother said again. 15

They were hopping around the windowsill, calling for bread and fats – robins, blackbirds, wood-peckers, jays, never seen together until now. We fed them for a while, amazed at their tameness, then put on our long wool scarves.

'Can we go out, Mother?'

'Well, don't catch cold. And remember to get some wood.' 20

First we found some old cocoa-tins, punched them with holes, then packed them with smouldering rags. If held in the hand and blown on occasionally they would keep hot for several hours. They were warmer than gloves, and smelt better too. In any case, we never wore gloves.

So, armed with these, and full of hot breakfast, we stepped out into the winter world. 25

It was a world of glass, sparkling and motionless. Vapours had frozen all over the trees and transformed them into confections of sugar. Everything was rigid, locked-up and sealed, and when we breathed the air it smelt like needles and stabbed our nostrils and made us sneeze.

Having sucked a few icicles, and kicked the water-butt – to hear its solid sound – and breathed through the frost on the window-pane, we ran up into the road. We hung around waiting for something to happen. A dog trotted past like a ghost in a cloud, panting his aura around him. 30

Now the winter's day was set in motion and we rode through its crystal kingdom. We examined the village for its freaks of frost, for anything we might use. We saw the frozen spring by the side of the road, huge like a swollen flower. We saw trees lopped-off by their burdens of ice, cow-tracks like pot-holes in rock, quiet lumps of sheep licking the spiky grass with their black and rotting tongues. The church clock had stopped and the weather-cock was frozen, so that both time and the winds were stilled; and nothing, we thought, could be more exciting than this. 35

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