

Snow Day Fever

by W.M. Akers



Snow stuck to Ned's window in bunches-like clumps of cotton in a washing machine's lint trap. The sun was coming up slowly, and the sky had a strange reddish, purple tinge that could only mean one thing: a snow day. Ned eased open his window, coughing from the effort, and stuck a ruler into the powder.

"Four inches," he said. "Four!"

As he said it, he heard cheers from downstairs. The school superintendent must have a ruler too, he thought. Jamie and Ellen were glued to the local news, and they must have just heard that school was canceled. What he wouldn't give to be down there sharing in the good news.

Ned pressed his knuckles to his forehead. It didn't feel hot to him. He raided his closet and came out with all the heaviest clothes he could find. He tugged on two or three sweaters, a pair of sweatpants and snow pants, and as many hats as his head could hold.

"I am going outside to play," he said.

"Oh no you're not," said his mother from the hallway. She sounded much more confident than he did, and he knew he couldn't beat her. He felt too tired to even argue. He took off his hats and cast them on the floor, defeated.

Ned's school district got one snow day a year, if they were lucky. Usually it came in February after the worst of the winter weather was behind them. The weather forecaster would report a prediction of two inches, the sky would probably provide only half an inch, and the superintendent would cancel class anyway. Ned's mother said they were being timid, but Ned knew better. Those halfhearted snow days came out of pity for the children stuck in class.

Even the superintendent was a child once, and he knew how important a snow day could be. It's not often that the whole world decides to take a break, that even grown ups go out and play, that children are called crazy if all they want to do is stay inside. A snow day is a rare and beautiful thing, something special, something not to be missed.

"Unless you have a temperature of 103 degrees."

"102.7, Mom. It's only 102.7."

"I'm rounding up."

"That's math class talk. I don't have to go to school today. No math!"

"Fine, no math. And no snow pants either. Get back in bed and eat your soup."

"Soup for breakfast?"

"Soup for sick kids."

"I feel fine, Mom. Really! I can go out and play just for a little while."

"You don't look fine. You're clammy. You're sweating."

"Probably because of all the soup I've had to eat!"

"Eat up, Ned, and get some sleep. I'll be back later. I'm taking Jamie and Ellen to the park."

Ned watched his little brother and sister squeeze into their snow gear and waddle out the front door. He choked down his soup, burning his tongue to spite his mother. He was angry. He was frustrated. He was...very, very tired.

Ned woke up, his soup at his side, snow still falling outside his window. He wasn't sweating. He wasn't clammy. He was feeling pretty good!

His hand shot out from under the blankets and jammed the electric thermometer into his mouth. After a few tense minutes, the answer came back: 99.8 degrees. Better. Much better!

"Mom! My fever broke! Can I go outside now?"

"When you get to 98.6 degrees, you can go outside."

Ned pulled on his pants, sweaters and hats. He waddled downstairs, the thermometer clutched in his hand. He crept into the kitchen, as sneaky as someone wearing four layers

could be, and filled a glass with ice water. The thermometer beeped as it slid into the water.

"You can see the thermometer, Mom!" he shouted. "I'm in the kitchen. Ninety-eight-point-six, right on the nose."

Ned heard his mother coming down the hall. The thermometer wasn't finished taking a reading yet, but there wasn't time to wait. He jammed it into his mouth just as she came around the door. It beeped, finished, and he handed it to her.

"See?" he said.

"Oh dear. Oh dear, Ned-we have to get you to the hospital!"

"What?"

The digital display told the story. Ned had a temperature of 48.7 degrees-cold enough to be legally dead.

"Oh sweetheart, you must be the first kid ever who cheated to make his temperature lower."

Defeated, Ned started tugging off his hats, until he felt his mother's hand stop him.

"Let's go outside," she said. "For a lie that lousy, you deserve a fifteen-minute snowball fight."

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What does Ned conclude when he hears cheers from downstairs at the beginning of the story?

- A. At least four inches of snow has fallen.
- B. School is canceled.
- C. School is not canceled.
- D. His mom will let him go outside.

2. What main problem does Ned face?

- A. He can't find enough warm clothes to play outside.
- B. He has a temperature of 98.6 degrees.
- C. He is sick with a fever, so his mother won't let him play outside in the snow.
- D. His soup is so hot it burns his tongue.

3. Ned is desperate to play outside in the snow. What evidence from the text supports this conclusion?

- A. "She sounded much more confident than he did, and he knew he couldn't beat her."
- B. "Ned's mother said they were being timid, but Ned knew better."
- C. "He wasn't sweating. He wasn't clammy. He was feeling pretty good!"
- D. "Oh sweetheart, you must be the first kid ever who cheated to make his temperature lower."

4. Why does Ned's mother finally let him play outside?

- A. He promises to eat more soup and take a rest afterwards.
- B. She feels sorry for him.
- C. His temperature finally falls to 98.6 degrees.
- D. She takes him to the hospital, and he feels better.

5. What is the main idea of this text?

- A. Ned is so sick that if he goes outside, his temperature could drop.
- B. Ned wants to have a snowball fight outside rather than go to math class.
- C. Ned tries to convince his mother he is well enough to play outside so that he won't miss the snow day.
- D. Ned is so excited about the snow day that he forgets he is sick with a fever.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

He was angry. He was frustrated. He was... very, very tired.

Why does the author include a pause in the last sentence?

- A. to emphasize how tired Ned feels
- B. to emphasize how angry Ned feels
- C. to show how confused Ned is
- D. to show how quietly Ned is speaking

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

_____ Ned's fever is not completely gone, his mother lets him have a snowball fight outside.

- A. On the contrary
- B. Even though
- C. Specifically
- D. For example

8. What does Ned want to do when he learns school is canceled?

9. How many snow days does Ned's school district get?

10. Apart from school being canceled, why are snow days so important to Ned? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
