

A Brief View to Study Robert Frost's Poems

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My purpose to write this article is to help high school and college students to prepare a project or thesis on the poems of Robert Frost. A student may use the assignment guidelines provided by his instructor. He may want to begin by stating his thesis or theme statement and then go on to develop that. For example:

- Frost often wrote poems about lonely places to illustrate some psychological idea. Give examples and elaborate.
- Frost bridged the 19th and 20th century. Frost followed Whitman, Poe and Dickinson. He was a contemporary of E.A. Robinson, T. S. Eliot, and Carl Sandburg. Discuss.
- Frost had a life-long interest in astronomy. He used star imagery and metaphor in his poems. Why? Give examples.

A paper could include any of the following material:

- **Biographical info.** A student may write about poet's life, the connections between his life and poetry, his place in the 19th-20th century related to other poets. A student can compare him to another poet like E. A. Robinson, T. S. Eliot or Carl Sandburg.
- **Frost's Style.** Frost said style is how the poet takes himself. The tone of the poem is a good clue. Style is "how" the poem is written. Identify the organization / form / structure of the poem - sonnet, ode, elegy, and idyll, lyric. Elaborate this with meter, rhyme scheme, and rhythm devices that intensify meaning. Identify the use of figurative language, metaphor, and poetical devices: alliteration, assonance, consonance, and antithesis. Identify symbols and images. Frost used traditional English meters and form, but introduced conversational language in his poetry. Frost's poem "Storm Fear" is a virtual catalogue of these elements, as well as "Nothing Gold Can Stay" and "Two Tramps in Mudtime."
- **Theme and meaning** is "what" the poem is about. It should be remembered that the theme of the poem is the central idea of the work, which can be expressed in a few words. There are certain recurring themes in Frost's poetry: loneliness, retreat, loss, love. A theme is usually psychologically oriented - the image in the mind.

Frost's use of nature is the single most misunderstood element of his poetry. Although Frost describes nature, especially the seasons, time of day, and things like stars, flowers, and landscape - those are NOT themes. Frost is not trying to tell you how nature works, even though he uses quite a lot of nature imagery. Nature is the setting, especially the nature and landscape of New England. Nature can be the subject matter of the poem,

without being the theme. There is almost always a person in the poem. To understand the theme, ask what the people are experiencing and feeling.

Reginald Cook, a noted Frost scholar says, "Frost's art consists in coordinating the world of natural phenomena and the world of human beings - the two chief sources of his material - fusing the fact of nature with the image in the mind. In a poem, Frost starts with a feeling of the thing seen, and the eye - inner or outer - is always on the object. His basic method of organization is a logical flow of ideas in a series of events as they occur. ..". He usually starts with an observation in nature, mulls it around and then connects it to some human concern. Frost rarely draws a conclusion or makes a judgment. If a student is at a total loss as to the meaning of a poem, he can always analyse form, rhyme, meter, and poetic devices.

Literary Criticism A student may use critical analysis, for instance, Reginald Cook, John Lynen or Rueben Brower. He may consult various libraries or resources available on the internet. 5) The use of criticism will greatly illuminate Frost's poetry. However, most of the 300 poems he wrote are not well analysed. It is better to write in-depth on 1 or 2 of the famous pieces that are backed up with a scholarly opinion. A student can use other poems, as long as he doesn't need in depth analysis. Students often want to "get off the beaten path" only to find there is no research available and they don't know how to analyse the poem. The following poems will produce good, substantial material for a paper.

- Acquainted with the Night
- After Apple-Picking
- Birches
- Desert Places
- Design
- Fire and Ice
- Mending Wall
- Nothing Gold Can Stay
- Once by the Pacific
- Out, Out
- The Road Not Taken
- Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

Some of these poems go well in a comparison - some don't. Stopping by Woods, Acquainted/Night and Desert Places feed into the "dark side" - a progression of isolation/loneliness. Birches, Mending Wall and NGCS use beautiful nature imagery to illustrate 3 different themes. After Apple-Picking and Design are religious. Stopping by Woods and The Road Not Taken are about making choices.

Often, a student will find that the critics are not consistent in their opinions, or that they disagree. That is to be expected. Frost was often asked to explain his poems. His reply was always: "I have written my poem as well as I possibly could and now you want me to restate it, using inferior language?" Now, everyone plays the game of what the poem is really about. A poem will truly reveal itself to the reader over a period of time. Use the on line [Poetic Glossary of Terms](http://www.poeticbyway.com/glossary.html) to look up all those confusing definitions. <http://www.poeticbyway.com/glossary.html>

Remember you are being graded on your ability to construct and organize your thoughts using correct English, grammar, and spelling. Your instructor may not really care how much you know about Robert Frost. Constructing a well-organized, well researched paper is a good exercise in resourcefulness. That is part of your education.