

Poem #3

“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost

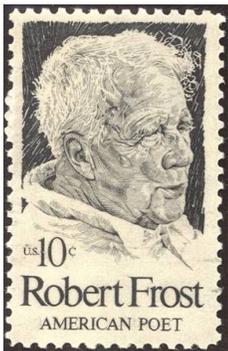
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

– ROBERT FROST



This poem is one of the best known of Frost’s poems, and one of the most popular poems in the English language. Although most people see it as explaining the importance of being an individual and taking the road “less traveled,” most critics see it as an ironic poem that is a parody of people (specifically his friend, Edward Thomas) who regret not having taken other paths than the ones they did, when it really made no difference.

People who read the poem this way, see the last two lines as ironic. Frost himself called this poem “tricky.” The analysis on the next page looks at both interpretations, one on the right, one on the left.

Taking it apart

Popular Interpretation



Critical Interpretation



“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

He has a choice of which road to take, and one of them “wants wear,” meaning that not as many people have gone down it.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having ~~perhaps~~ the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

Even though one road was slightly less worn than the other, they were really “about the same.”

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!

The roads are equal. They both have leaves that no one has trampled on.

Once he’s made the choice to go down one road, he knows that he will probably never face this same choice again. The chance is lost. He is committed to the path fewer have gone down.

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

He is looking back on the choice from a time in the future and putting more of meaning into it than there was at the time. The roads were almost equal. There really was no difference. He’s not being completely honest with himself or he’s being overly dramatic about a minor choice he made a long time ago.

Because he chose a different road than most people choose, he had a completely different life than he might have led otherwise. This small difference earlier made a huge difference later.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Memorizing it

This poem has a strong rhyme scheme in which the first, third, and fourth lines rhyme with each other, and the second and fifth lines rhyme with each other.

Highlight the last words of each line using one color to highlight the last word of lines 1, 3, and 4, and a different color to highlight the last word of lines 2 and 5.

Read through the poem out loud three times, emphasizing the rhyme and trying to make a mental picture of the highlighting.

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Memorizing it

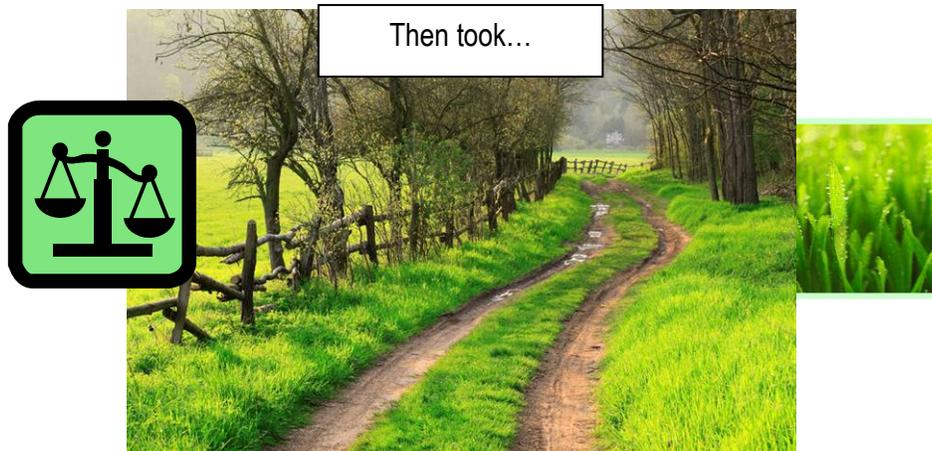
Can you say the poem with only the visual clues given below?

“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost

1st Stanza:



2nd Stanza:



MENSA[®] for kids

3rd Stanza

=

way
way

1st

O

sigh

2

4th Stanza

+

all the difference

See if you can put these stanzas in order by putting the number of the stanza in the box.

“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost

I s__ be t__ t__ a __
S__ ages and ages ____:
2 r__ d__ in a __, & I -
I__ the __ less t__ by,
& t__ has m__ all the d__.

Two __ d__ in a y__ w__,
& s__ l c__ t__
& be 1 t__, long l s__
& l__ d__ 1__ f__ as l c__
To __ it __ in the ____;

T__ t__ the __, as j__ as f__,
& h__ p__ the b__ __,
B__ it w__ g__ & w__ w__;
T__ as f__ t__ the p__ t__
H__ w__ t__ r__ a__ the s__.

& b__ t__ m__ e__ l__
In l__ no s__ h__ t__ b__.
Oh, I k__ the f__ for a__ __!
Yet k__ h__ w__ l__ on to w__,
I __ if I __ e__ c__ b__.