

This is the full lesson text from [www.skoool.ie](http://www.skoool.ie) for the Robert Frost poem, 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening'.

#### PARAPHRASE

The speaker's attention wanders as he makes his way home on horseback through the snowy landscape on December 21st. He asks himself who owns the woods and then answers his own question - their owner lives in the village. The evening is cold but the musing continues until even his horse becomes impatient. Though the man knows he should keep going - it is dark, cold and late - he becomes enchanted. Then as the silence deepens (even a snowflake can be heard) the harness bells ring out and the poet is caught between enjoying the beauty of the moment and the urgency of keeping promises, promises which, perhaps, he made earlier.

#### THEME

At the heart of this poem lies one of life's great quandaries (dilemmas) and it is the theme of the poem: whether to follow the call of the imagination or to live life as a cautious, prudent, responsible human being. Everybody, at some time, experiences this kind of dilemma, but for a poet or an artist it is acute. Like so many of Robert Frost's poems, 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' recounts a simple incident that seems of great significance for the poet. While travelling home on the darkest evening of the year (mid-winter) he stops to admire a neighbour's woods as they fill up with snow. The poet is hypnotised by the sight and becomes lost in reverie (reflection). We do not know how long he has been standing watching the woods but his horse becomes restless and shakes its bells. The poet awakens from his daydream and becomes aware of how peculiar it would seem to others if they saw him looking at the woods in this way. The poet wants to continue gazing at the woods but he realises that he has responsibilities and "promises" to keep and that he must continue on his long journey away from the woods towards home and those who wait there for him.

#### IMAGERY

The title of the poem, 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' conjures up a striking and mysterious image of dark woods silhouetted against the white ground and a snow-filled sky. The man stops to look at the woods and is captivated. His observation of the scene takes on a dream-like quality which is enhanced by the setting of the poem on, "The darkest evening of the year". In the second and third stanzas the man is disturbed from his thoughts because his horse has grown restless. The poet, here, gives the horse almost human qualities when he says: My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near... The horse has become impatient and wants to continue the journey. Again, we see how the poet attributes human thoughts to the horse when he writes: He gives his harness bells and shake  
To ask if there is some mistake  
Horses obviously don't think in this way so the thoughts the poet attributes to the horse are really his own thoughts, his own restlessness. The horse represents the part of the poet that thinks that it is strange to stop and look at woods when it is late and cold and he has "miles to go" before he sleeps. In the final stanza, the poet acknowledges the opposing feelings in himself: the desire to be alone and admire the woods, and the desire to honour his responsibilities and continue his long journey home: And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep.