

This is the full lesson text from www.skool.ie for the Robert Frost poem, 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening'.

ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE

Mood 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' is a poem about a simple event. We have all stopped to look at nature and sometimes this can give rise to powerful and mysterious feelings. The poet here is on his way home. It is late, dark and snowing. He should just keep going but he becomes hypnotised by the woods and stops to look at them "fill up with snow". While the poet's description of the event is simple, the feeling behind the words creates a sense of great mystery. He becomes aware of how he is alone as no one else will be travelling at that late hour. As result, he experiences a tremendous feeling of solitude and seems to see the woods with a clarity he has not experienced before. It is as though he has encountered the woods for the first time: The woods are lovely, dark and deep, Again, the dream quality of this encounter is reinforced by the poet's statement at the end of the poem that he has many miles to travel before he "sleeps". This is, of course, true but the idea of sleep is given special emphasis. The encounter with the woods has become a parable or a symbol for the journey of life. In this sense, the long journey home is a metaphor for the peace that the poet hopes to experience in death. But before he can realise this peace, he has many responsibilities and tasks that he must first complete.

RHYME

The poet uses a number of poetic devices to convey the mysterious, dream-like nature of his experience as he watches the woods. To begin with, we notice that the poem has a very regular rhythm and uses a strong interlaced rhyme pattern: aaba / bbcb / ccdd / dddd. By repeating certain key sounds (rhymes) the poet attempts to hypnotise us in the way the woods have hypnotised him. In the last stanza the poet takes this repetition further when he end rhymes all four lines (this is extremely unusual) as well as repeating the final line in its entirety. By repeating the last line in this way the poet gives emphasis to the great length of the journey he has to make as well as reinforcing the fact that the journey has not yet been started. AlliterationThe poet also uses alliteration to add to the hypnotic mood he has created in the poem using rhythm and rhyme. We see in the first stanza the repetition of certain sounds such as "w" and "s" (whose / woods; see / stopping; watch / woods) which help to create a verbal harmony alongside the rhymes. The repetition of the word "woods" also helps to keep the image of the woods central in the first stanza. If you look at rest of the poem you will notice the alliteration of the "s" sound in the third stanza as well as the "d" sound in the final stanza, which again help to establish the atmospheric quality of the poem. SibillanceWhile the poet uses rhyme and alliteration to create the dream-like music in the poem, he also uses a more unusual effect known as sibillance. Sibillance occurs when we have the repetition of the sharp "s" sound found, for example, in the word "hiss". Unlike alliteration, sibillance may occur in any part of a word not just at the beginning, as is the case with alliteration. If you look closely at the poem you will see that sibillance occurs in every stanza with great frequency. This sound enhances and unifies the sound and mood of the poem with the "s" sound forming a kind of background music to the more obvious and direct music of the rhymes and alliteration.

POINTS TO PONDER:

'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' is a poem about a mysterious encounter with the natural world. Some people view this poem as a beautiful lyric which captures perfectly a "picture postcard moment" while others view it as a dark meditation on the difficulties of living a solitary and creative life. Which view of the poem do you think is more accurate? What are your reasons? This poem is about a particular incident - but do you think it may also have a symbolic quality? Remember an image is symbolic when it refers to something concrete (the poet stopping by the woods) but also suggests some other meaning. When the poet tells us he has "miles to go before I sleep" we know that he has a long journey home, but could this journey be a symbol for the long journey of life? Discuss.

BACKGROUND:

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco in 1874. He attended Harvard College but left before receiving a degree and moved his family to a small poultry farm in New England. In 1912 Frost moved to England where he achieved his first literary success publishing *A Boy's Will* in 1913. Frost then returned to New England where poetry had become popular and he continued to write for the rest of his life while living on farms in Vermont and New Hampshire. In 1961, at the inauguration of a President John F. Kennedy, Frost became the first poet to read a poem at a Presidential inauguration. He died in 1963.