

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

*Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.*

*My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.*

*He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.*

*The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*



Robert Frost (1874-1963) is among the most celebrated American poets. He believed that poetry was meant to be spoken, so his style was heavily influenced by sensitivity to the natural rhythms of speech and the sound of the human voice. His work was sometimes criticized for being too conversational in tone, but this characteristic, coupled with the broad appeal of his subject matter, contributed to his widespread popularity within his own lifetime. Although not opposed to stepping outside the bounds of traditional forms, he disliked free verse, stating, "Writing free verse is like playing tennis with the net down." He was awarded four Pulitzer Prizes for poetry.

Although he was born in San Francisco, Frost moved to New England early in life and made his permanent home there. His affinity for rural life in that region is evident throughout his work. Robert Frost's strong sense of place is, in itself, a topic worthy of further study.

Discussion Questions

What words in this poem help paint the picture of rural life in New England?

Why do you think the traveler gave consideration to whether or not the owner of the woods would see him?

Do you think his solitude made him more likely to appreciate this encounter with nature?

Falling snow creates a peaceful, mesmerizing scene, so the desire to pause and watch is easy to relate to. Can you think of other natural forces that evoke a similar response?

“Woods” are often filled with the various sounds of nature. Why do you think this scene was particularly quiet?

Why do you think the final verse is repeated twice?

Do you wish you knew more about this scene? What other details would interest you?

Do you find this poem easy to read? Do you like it? Why or why not?

The Structure

“Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” consists of four stanzas, each of which has four lines. (A stanza of four lines is called a *quatrain*.) With the exception of the final stanza, it follows an a-a-b-a *rhyme scheme*—meaning that the first, second, and fourth lines end in words that rhyme. Note that in this poem, the unrhymed final word in the third line of each stanza sets up the rhyme for the following stanza. (For example, here → queer, near, year.)

1	2	3	4
Whose WOODS	these ARE	I THINK	I KNOW
1	2	3	4
His HOUSE	is IN	the VILL	age THOUGH
1	2	3	4
He WILL	not SEE	me STOP	ping HERE
1	2	3	4
To WATCH	his WOODS	fill UP	with SNOW

A *foot* (also called a *poetic foot*) is the smallest basic unit of measurement in poetic rhythm. In the stanza above, each foot is marked by a number, and as you can see, each line has four feet. A line of poetry that has four feet is called a *tetrameter*.

You’ll also notice that within each foot, the second word is stressed (as indicated by the bold, capitalized text), and the first word is unstressed. This type of foot is called an *iamb*.

Because “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” is composed of lines with four feet (tetrameter), and each foot has an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (iamb), it is said to be written in *iambic tetrameter*.

Glossary of Terms

Quatrain- A stanza of four lines.

Rhyme scheme- The pattern of rhyme within a poem.

Meter- The rhythmic structure of a verse.

Foot- Two or more syllables that together make up the smallest unit of rhythm in a poem.

Iamb- A foot consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.

Tetrameter- A poetic line consisting of four feet.