

## **Fire and Ice**

### **- Robert Frost**

#### **Introduction**

Robert Frost's poem "Fire and Ice" expresses the profound idea that the world would end in either of two ways, either by ice or fire. Both the components are compared with self-destructing human emotions: hatred and desire. The poem, very artistically, underpins the philosophy that we let our emotions rule us and if don't control them they will surely destroy everything around us. Similarly, he thinks fire and ice, both are just as competent in bringing the world to a catastrophic end.

#### **Theme of the poem**

The destructive power of human desire and the inevitable end of the world brought on by either fire (passion/desire) or ice (hatred/indifference) are the themes of Robert Frost's poem "Fire and Ice." The poem examines the possibility that either extreme emotion or total indifference could bring about the end of the world.

#### **Paraphrase for first stanza**

The poem expresses the profound idea that the world would end in either of two ways, either by ice or fire. One group is of the opinion that someday the Earth's core will get so heated up that it would lead to fire destroying the earth's surface. On the other hand, the second group says that if the temperature goes down to an extent that makes life on Earth impossible, it would have the same catastrophic effect. The poet then compares fire and ice with the destructive features of human emotions; desire and hatred. He says that from what he is aware about "fiery desires", he would favour the ones who say that it would be fire. By saying so, he brings about the idea that human beings let their emotions rule them and the consequence of unmonitored longing is chaos.

#### **Paraphrase for second stanza**

Then by not waving off the first option of fire, he considers if the world has to expire twice, ice would be equally competent in ending it. He brings about a contrast between "ice" and "hatred". The human capability of insensitivity and hatred has the potential for inner destruction. Though slow and steady, it has the same effect that desire has on us. So if given an option between fire and ice, ice would be just as good as fire to destroy the world.

#### **Thinking about the poem**

**1. There are many ideas about how the world will 'end'. Do you think the world will end some day? Have you ever thought what would happen if the sun got so hot that it 'burst', or grew colder and colder?**

**Answer:** Unfortunately, the world is going to end one day and there is nothing we can do about it. There are many ideas as to how it will end but one can't say surely. The reason that life exists only on Earth is that the circumstances and temperature is apt to make it possible. If the sun gets so hot one day that it is at the verge of bursting, it would lead to rapid destruction as there would be fire everywhere. Conversely, if it grows colder and colder, there will be ice everywhere on Earth and life in any form would not be able to sustain at such low temperatures.

**2. For Frost, what do 'fire' and 'ice' stand for? Here are some ideas:**

**greed avarice cruelty lust conflict fury intolerance  
rigidity insensitivity coldness indifference hatred**

**Answer:** According to Frost, 'fire' stands for greed, conflict, fury, cruelty, lust and avarice whereas 'Ice' stands for insensitivity, coldness, intolerance, indifference, rigidity and hatred.

**3. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem? How does it help in bringing out the contrasting ideas in the poem?**

**Answer:** The rhyme scheme of the poem is “aba abc bcb”. The poet has used the rhyming beautifully to bring about contrasting ideas in the poem. He has used the ideas of two groups who believe that the world would come to a catastrophic end either as a result of fire or ice. Simultaneously, he portrays these two essential components as features of destructive human emotions: desire and hatred. Just like fiery desires and icy hatred can cause damage to an individual in an irreparable manner, fire and ice can lead the world at the verge of chaos and thus, apocalypse.