Mending Walls
(Robert Frost)

Mending Wall Introduction:

Robert Frost is one of America's most beloved poets, and "Mending Wall" is one of his most popular poems. This poem tells the tale of a rock wall which sits between two properties in the countryside. Something continually destroys this rock wall. A compelling aspect of "Mending Wall" is the Frostian sense of mystery and loneliness. What begins as a quest to discover the identity of the wall-destroyer, ends in a meditation on the value of tradition and boundaries.

"Mending Wall" is the first poem in *North of Boston*, Frost's second book of poetry. This book was published when Frost was in England, rubbing elbows with the likes of W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound. Frost was a contemporary of many modernist poetic movements, but he isn't associated with any particular group of poets. He marched to his own drummer, and as a result, he garnered a good deal of criticism from the literary world. But, it is precisely because he was such an individual and his voice so original that Frost became so beloved.

Born in San Francisco, Frost moved to Massachusetts at age eleven following his father's death. He attended both Dartmouth College and Harvard University, but never earned a college degree. He was, however, often invited to teach at Dartmouth and Harvard later on in his life. You know you're good when you get to teach college students without having a diploma yourself. After spending some time in England, Frost befriended a lot of poetic giants, including William Butler Yeats and Ezra Pound. Frost won four Pulitzer Prizes in his lifetime, and he was asked to read a poem at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration. If you are to randomly choose one of Frost's poems and read it aloud on a busy street, we bet that a bunch of people will recognize the poem instantly as Frost's – his sound and style is so unique. Mending walls was written in 1914, Mending Wall is a poem in blank verse that remains relevant for these uncertain times.

What is Mending Wall About?

"Mending Wall" makes us take a look at how we use our walls and boundaries, and why we use them the way we do. This poem sends a wake-up call to the universe. Think of it like a spring-cleaning project in which Frost, with broom and dust pan in hand, hopes to re-evaluate the habits that humans can't seem to shake. Boundaries aren't necessarily a bad thing, this poem seems to tell us, as long as we occasionally question the purpose of our walls, or maybe just as long as we *question*.

Overview:

Mending wall involves two rural neighbours who one spring day meet to walk along the wall that separates their properties and repair it where needed.

The speaker in the poem is a progressive individual who starts to question the need for such a wall in the first place. The neighbour beyond the hill is a traditionalist and has, it seems, little time for such

nonsense.

'*Good fences make good neighbours,*' is all he will say.

We all have neighbours, we all know that walls eventually need repairing. Walls separate and keep people apart, walls deny right of passage and yet provide security. Despite the need for such a barrier, the opening line - *Something there is that doesn't love a wall,* - implies that the idea of a wall isn't that straightforward.

Robert Frost, in his own inimitable way, invites the reader into controversy by introducing mischief into the poem. The speaker wants to put a notion into the head of his neighbour, to ask him to explain why is it good walls make *good neighbours,* but in the end says nothing.

A wall may seem useful in the countryside as it could help keep livestock safe and secure and mark a definite boundary. But a wall that separates village from village, city from city, country from country, people from people, family from family - that's a completely different scenario.

Robert Frost's poem can help pinpoint such issues and bring them out into the open.

"Mending Wall" Summary:

There is some force that doesn't like walls. It causes the frozen ground to swell underneath a wall, and the wall's upper stones then topple off in the warmth of the sun. This creates gaps in the wall so big that two people could walk through them side-by-side. And then there are the hunters who take apart the wall—that's something different. I often have to come and fix the spots where hunters haven't left a single stone in place, as they tried to flush out the rabbits that hide in the wall in order to make their barking dogs happy. No one has seen or heard these gaps in the wall being made. We just find them there in the spring, when it comes time to fix the wall. I reach out to my neighbour, who lives over a hill, and we find a day to get together and walk along the wall, fixing these gaps as we go. He walks on his side of the wall and I on mine, and we deal only with whatever rocks have fallen off the wall on our side of it. Some of them look like loaves of bread and some are round like balls, so we pray that they'll stay in place, balanced on top of the wall, saying: "Don't move until we're gone!" Our fingers get chafed from picking up the rocks. It's just another outside activity, each of us on our side of the wall, nothing more.

There's no need for a wall to be there. On my neighbour's side of the wall, there's nothing but pine trees; my side is an apple orchard. It's not like my apple trees are going to cross the wall and eat his pine cones, I say to him. But he just responds, "Good fences are necessary to have good neighbours." Since it's spring and I feel mischievous, I wonder if I could make my neighbour ask himself: "*Why* are they necessary? Isn't that only true if you're trying to keep your neighbour's cows out of your fields? There aren't any cows here. If I were to build a wall, I'd want to know what I was keeping in and what I was keeping out, and who was going to be offended by this. There is some force that doesn't love a wall, that wants to pull it down." I could propose that Elves are responsible for the gaps in the wall, but it's not exactly Elves, and, anyway, I want my neighbour to figure it out on his own. I see him, lifting up stones, grasping them firmly by the top, in each hand, like an ancient warrior. He moves in a deep darkness—not just the darkness of the woods or the trees above. He

does not want to think beyond his set idea about the world, and he likes having articulated this idea so clearly. So he says it again: “Good fences are necessary to have good neighbours.”

Form:

Blank verse is the baseline meter of this poem, but few of the lines march along in blank verse’s characteristic lock-step iambs, five abreast. Frost maintains five stressed syllables per line, but he varies the feet extensively to sustain the natural speech-like quality of the verse. There are no stanza breaks, obvious end-rhymes, or rhyming patterns, but many of the end-words share an assonance (e.g., *wall,hill,balls,wall,* and *wellsun,thing,stone,mean,line,* and *again* or *game,them,* and *him* twice) . Internal rhymes, too, are subtle, slanted, and conceivably coincidental. The vocabulary is all of a piece—no fancy words, all short (only one word, *another,* is of three syllables), all conversational—and this is perhaps why the words resonate so consummately with each other in sound and feel.

Commentary:

I have a friend who, as a young girl, had to memorize this poem as punishment for some now-forgotten misbehaviour. Forced memorization is never pleasant; still, this is a fine poem for recital. “Mending Wall” is sonorous, homey, wry—arch, even—yet serene; it is steeped in levels of meaning implied by its well-wrought metaphoric suggestions. These implications inspire numerous interpretations and make definitive readings suspect. Here are but a few things to think about as you reread the poem.

The image at the heart of “Mending Wall” is arresting: two men meeting on terms of civility and neighbourliness to build a barrier between them. They do so out of tradition, out of habit. Yet the very earth conspires against them and makes their task Sisyphean. Sisyphus, you may recall, is the figure in Greek mythology condemned perpetually to push a boulder up a hill, only to have the boulder roll down again. These men push boulders back on top of the wall; yet just as inevitably, whether at the hand of hunters or sprites, or the frost and thaw of nature’s invisible hand, the boulders tumble down again. Still, the neighbours persist. The poem, thus, seems to meditate conventionally on three grand themes: barrier-building (segregation, in the broadest sense of the word), the doomed nature of this enterprise, and our persistence in this activity regardless.

But, as we so often see when we look closely at Frost’s best poems, what begins in folksy straightforwardness ends in complex ambiguity. The speaker would have us believe that there are two types of people: those who stubbornly insist on building superfluous walls (with clichés as their justification) and those who would dispense with this practice—wall-builders and wall-breakers. But are these impulses so easily separable? And what does the poem really say about the necessity of boundaries?

The speaker may scorn his neighbour’s obstinate wall-building, may observe the activity with humorous detachment, but he himself goes to the wall at all times of the year to mend the damage done by hunters; it is the speaker who contacts the neighbour at wall-mending time to set the annual appointment. Which person, then, is the real wall-builder? The speaker says he sees no need for a wall here, but this implies that there may be a need for a wall elsewhere— “where there are cows,” for example. Yet the speaker must derive *something,* some use, some satisfaction, out of the exercise of wall-building, or why would he initiate it here? There is something in him that does love a wall, or at least the act of making a wall.

Stanza Explanation:

Section I (lines 1-4)

Line 1

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

• Our speaker cuts to the chase in this first line. Something is amiss in the world of walls.

• "Something" is a wishy-washy word, and just about anything under the sun can qualify as "something." Even a person.

• By using "something" instead of "someone," our speaker suggests that humans are not the only wall-destroying culprits around; there are *things* out there as well.

• We begin to channel Sherlock Holmes as we strap on our detective hats. Folks, we are smack dab in the middle of a thrilling, blood-curdling mystery – about walls.

Lines 2-3

That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,

• So, this "something" wields magical powers, apparently. Whoever or whatever it is, it aces Physics, because it knows that water particles swell when frozen, and shrink when warm.

• Our speaker hypothesizes that the Something asks nature to cool down the earth below the wall and warm up the boulders in the wall, thus wrecking havoc upon the wall itself. The boulders start to crumble from all of the natural action.

Line 4

And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

• As a result of said natural action, the wall has gaps big enough for two people to pass through comfortably. Holding hands. That's a big gap.

• And, if two people can pass through the wall easily, just IMAGINE what else can pass through. A golf cart. A baby elephant. A rickshaw. The list goes on and on.

Section II (lines 5-9)

Line 5

The work of hunters is another thing:

• You mean to tell us that there might be more than just one thing trying to destroy walls? In addition to the Something alluded to in line 1, our speaker tells us that hunters are culprits as well.

• However, their "work" (read: wall-destroying techniques) is very different from the Something's wall-destroying techniques. Let's examine.

Lines 6-7

I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,

• Our speaker must clean up after the hunters.
He says, "I have come after them," instead of "I came after them," giving us the impression that this is a common occurrence.

• That must not be very much fun. These hunters are like 4 year-olds – they play all the time, but they don't pick up after themselves. The speaker follows like a parent or a chaperon, rebuilding the parts of the wall that they destroy. Naughty hunters.

Lines 8-9

But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,

• Little bunnies like to hide inside the wall from the hunters, and, so, in turn, the hunters tear down the wall to find them. Poor little bunnies.

• However, the hunters aren't the selfish wall-wreckers that we think they are – they're merely trying to please their bunny-loving dogs. Wow.

• Sherlock, what do you say we take a step back, and look at the characters involved in this wall mystery so far: we have the Something of line 1 (a quiet suspect), the hunters (quite noisy and destructive culprits), bunnies (innocent, little creatures just looking for safety), and dogs (who want to eat the bunnies).

Section III (lines 10-11)

Lines 10-11

No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.

• We get a bit distracted by all of the bunnies and the dogs, and we hear a lot of barking and shouting in our heads. We keep thinking of the hunt scene from *Mary Poppins* – you know, right before she sings "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious?"

• Our speaker, sensing our sensory overload, steers us back on course. At the end of line 9, he says, "the gaps I mean," reminding us of the matter at hand (the broken wall), and reminding us about the

mysterious Something that destroys this wall.

• The Something is very different from the hunters and their dogs (the speaker knows all about them). The Something is far more covert. In fact, it's so covert that no one sees or hears it make gaps in the wall.
• The speaker says that, in Spring, "we find them there." Who is "we?" Is there yet *another* character on our hands?

• Well, at least, now we know when mending-time takes place: the Spring. That makes sense to us. Spring is a time of spring-cleaning, April showers, and little birdies chirping.

Section IV (lines 12-15)

Lines 12-15

I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.

• Our speaker has a neighbour.

• This neighbour lives beyond the hill (we love hills), and, come spring, our speaker tells the neighbour that the wall needs some mending. The two check their calendars, and decide to meet on a day when they're both free.

• At this point in time, the two walk the whole length of the wall which separates their properties. Our speaker walks on his side of the wall, and his neighbour walks on the other side of the wall.

• They fix the wall as they go. Good times.

Section V (lines 16-19)

Lines 16-19

To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'

• As the speaker and his neighbour walk the length of the wall, they pick up boulders along the way. Let's say a boulder falls onto our speaker's side of the wall – it's his job to replace said boulder as they walk along. Our speaker begins to pay serious attention to these boulders. Some of them look like loaves of bread. Others look like perfectly formed tennis balls.

• The point is that a lot of them are rounded, and our speaker and his neighbour have a difficult time putting these little boulders back into the wall. The boulders don't really want to stay in the right

place. We get the sense that the boulders roll off as soon as the speaker and his neighbour try to replace them.

• We imagine that this process is like trying to repair a really crumbly cake you've just made – you keep trying to fix the sides with icing, but it keeps falling apart! Next time, add more butter.

• The process of replacing the little boulders is so frustrating that the speaker and his neighbour resort to talking to the little rocks, and, in talking to them, they come up with a kind of spell. "Stay where you are until our backs our turned" doesn't have quite the same ring to it as "bibbity, bobbity, boo," but we guess it will do in a pinch. We wonder why the spell isn't simply, "Stay where you are!"

• Why must the speaker and his neighbour wish the boulders to stay in the right place "until our backs are turned?" It's as though the speaker and the neighbour surrender to the fact that the wall will fall apart again soon. They simply want the wall to stay intact in their presence.

• We use spells all the time – spells like "turn green, turn green!" while waiting at a stoplight.

Section VI (lines 20-22)

Lines 20-22

We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:

• As the speaker and his neighbour walk the length of their wall, their hands get sore from handling all of the rocks.

• The speaker likens the whole process to a game, like volleyball maybe. The wall is like a net, and the speaker and his neighbour are the two opposing teams.

• The speaker says that such a ritual "comes to little more." Mending the wall is just a game to him. There's no deeper purpose.

Section VII (lines 23-26)

Lines 23-26

There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.

• Newsflash! Our speaker slips in a little commentary here in Line 22. He indicates that the precious wall, the one that he spends all of this time talking about, is actually *unnecessary*.

• Wait a minute. We think we're here to uncover the mystery of the wall-destroyer. Now, we find out that our speaker isn't really that into the wall itself.

• Hmm. If we are Sherlockian about this, we just might suspect our speaker as the unknown wall-destroyer.

• Our speaker wants to convince his neighbour that the wall is plain unnecessary. He uses the old apples-aren't-carnivorous argument, and tells his neighbour that the apples that he grows will never eat or disturb the pine trees which grow on his neighbour's property.

Section VIII (lines 27-29)

Lines 27-29

He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbours'.
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:

• In response to the apples-aren't-carnivorous argument, the neighbour simply says, "Good fences make good neighbours."
• Believe it or not, this is a famous proverb (a common saying that expresses a truth) around for centuries. You can interpret it how you will, but we take it to mean that this neighbour likes his privacy and his own space.

• If he posted an ad on Craigslist, looking for a new roommate, it would probably read something like, "Quiet person seeks even quieter roommate for a two-bedroom apartment. Roommate must stay clean and keep to him/herself."

• Our speaker becomes a bit mischievous, however (spring will do that to you). He desperately wants to stir the pot and challenge the "good fences make good neighbours" proverb. He wishes that he can somehow inspire his neighbour to rethink the whole wall thing.

Section IX (lines 30-37)

Lines 30-37

'Why do they make good neighbours?
Isn't it Where there are cows?
But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down." I could say, "Elves" to him
• Our speaker wants to know *why* good fences make good neighbours.

• Are fences and walls good because they keep the peace between neighbours by ensuring that

neither property is destroyed? If so, what could possibly destroy pine trees and apple orchards?

• The speaker understands the neighbour's philosophy, if one person has cows and wants to keep the cows from wrecking havoc. BUT, THERE ARE NO COWS (we wish there were).

• Our speaker gets a little saucy at this moment, and we infer that the wall was never his idea – his neighbour built the wall.
• The speaker puts on his "judgmental" hat and tells us that, if he ever builds a wall, he will first ask himself why he's building the wall and what that wall's purpose is.

• For example, is the wall's purpose to keep cows at bay, or to keep them from escaping? Will he mean the wall to discourage visitors, or to keep small children from wandering into the street?
• Our speaker also tells us that, if he ever is to build a wall (which, at this point, we're pretty sure he never will), he will first ask himself whether such a wall will offend anyone.

• Indeed, our speaker's feathers are ruffled.

• Does anyone catch the pun in "offense?" Get it? "Offense" sounds like "a fence." Hehe.

Section X (lines 38-41)

Lines 38-41

But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there,
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.

• Our speaker can tell his neighbour that elves keep destroying the wall, but he knows that it's not elves, and he wants his neighbour to come up with some silly explanation on his own.

• He wants his neighbour to lighten up, and to question the real necessity of keeping a wall between them.

• Suddenly, we're back in the present tense, and our speaker sees the neighbour close by.

• The neighbour repairs the wall, and, as he holds onto a stone, our speaker thinks that the guy looks kind of caveman-is. It's as if walls are holdovers from more primitive times.

Section XI (lines 42-43)

Lines 42-43

He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.

• The neighbour doesn't only look a bit like an "old-stone savage," but there's also darkness in him.

• What kind of darkness? Well, it's not the kind of darkness that comes from standing in the woods beneath a thick canopy of treetops. This is a different kind of darkness. We don't know exactly what this means, but we get goose bumps.

• There's something a little eerie about this neighbour.

Section XII (lines 44-46)

Lines 44-46

He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbours."

• We learn that the neighbour's favourite saying ("Good fences make good neighbours") actually isn't his own, but harkens back to his father's saying.

• When the speaker tells us this, we see this neighbour as a man of tradition and old-school rules.

• Rules are made to be broken.

Mending Wall Analysis:

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,

And spills the upper boulders in the sun;

And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

The work of hunters is another thing:

I have come after them and made repair

Where they have left not one stone on a stone,

But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,

To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,

From lines 1 to 9, the narrator says that there is something mysterious in the nature that does not want walls. That something always destroys the walls, making a gap in the wall through which two people can easily pass. The narrator says that sometimes the wall is damaged by some careless hunters, who pull down the stones of the walls in search of rabbits to please their barking dogs.

No one has seen them made or heard them made,

But at spring mending-time we find them there.

I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;

And on a day we meet to walk the line

And set the wall between us once again.

We keep the wall between us as we go.

To each the boulders that have fallen to each.

And some are loaves and some so nearly balls

We have to use a spell to make them balance:

'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'

We wear our fingers rough with handling them.

Oh, just another kind of out-door game,

One on a side. It comes to little more:

There where it is we do not need the wall:

From lines 9 to 22, the narrator says that though no one has ever heard the noise or seen anyone making the gaps, they do exist when it is time to mend the walls during spring season. They are realities, and so the narrator asks his neighbour to go beyond the hill and find out after all who creates these gaps. One day, when both of them (narrator and neighbour) determine to walk along the wall, they are surprised to see stones scattered on the ground. They see that some stones are shaped like bread loaves, while a few of them are round in shape. Due to their mysterious shape, the narrator and neighbour find it quite difficult to put them in their previous position. Seeing the unusual shape of these stones, the narrator thinks of using some kind of magic trick to place the stones back on the wall. Though all through the process of tackling the stones their fingers become too rough and make them exhausted, it is like an outdoor game for them, wherein the wall works as a net and both (the narrator and his neighbour) are opponents.

He is all pine and I am apple orchard.

My apple trees will never get across

And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.

He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbours.'

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder

If I could put a notion in his head:

'Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it

Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know

What I was walking in or walling out,

And to whom I was like to give offense.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,

But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather

He said it for himself. I see him there

From lines 22 to 36, the narrator makes every possible effort to make his neighbour understand that we don't need a wall. He asks why to have a wall, when he has only pine trees and I have only apple. How can his apple trees trespass the wall border and eat his neighbour's pine cones. Moreover there is no chance of offending as they don't also have any cows at their homes. While the narrator tries to make his neighbour understand that they don't need a wall, as there is something that does not love a wall, his neighbour is stone-headed savage, who continues to believe in his father's age old cliché that, "Good fences make good neighbours."

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,

But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather

He said it for himself. I see him there

Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top

In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.

He moves in darkness as it seems to me,

Not of woods only and the shade of trees.

He will not go behind his father's saying,

And he likes having thought of it so well

He says again, ‘Good fences make good neighbours.’

From lines 37 to 46: Though all through the poem, the narrator wants to put his notion into his neighbour’s mind, the kind of imagination he makes to convince his neighbour about the existence of wall (s) sometimes also make me think twice about the poet. For example, let’s take these lines wherein the narrator tells his friend (neighbour) that there is something like non-human entity as elves that come and break the walls. We all know that elves are those supernatural beings that are tiny in size and can only be seen in the mythological stories and folklore. But immediately when the narrator changes his opinion and feels that it is not the work of elves rather some kind of power in nature, I feel relieved as the narrator is finally talking sense. He says it is the work of nature that works against any type of walls and barriers.

However, the narrator gets immensely irritated to see his neighbour firmly holding a stone and giving a look of an ancient stone-age man, who is getting armed to fight. The narrator feels that his neighbour is too ignorant to convince. He always wants to be stuck and follow his father’s words that good fences make good neighbours.

Symbols, Imagery, Wordplay

Symbols used in the poem "Mending Wall" by Robert Frost include the wall itself, the apple orchard, the pine trees, and the reference to this being a "game" for the neighbours.

The main symbol in the poem is the wall itself. The wall in question is a low stone structure that marks the dividing line between the speaker's farm and his neighbour’s farm. Every winter, the wall gets damaged—stones fall away or are displaced by hunters—and the two men meet to repair the wall when warmer weather returns.

The wall symbolizes good boundaries, especially in the repeated phrase, "good fences making good neighbours." However, the wall also symbolizes community. Repairing the wall brings the two together in a yearly ritual that helps them remain good neighbours by bonding. They talk, they joke, and they complete a project together. For all that the speaker complains about the wall being unnecessary, he seems to enjoy this annual ritual of repairing it. Ironically, he is the one who initiates it in the spring:

> I let my neighbour know.

Another symbol Frost employs in this poem is darkness. As the speaker notes of his neighbour,

> He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
>
> Not of woods only and the shade of trees.

Here, darkness symbolizes ignorance. The speaker sees his neighbour as backward and tradition bound for insisting on completing this yearly ritual even though neither of them has livestock that

could wander over the property line. Seeing his neighbour carrying a rock grasped from the top in either hand, the speaker even likens him to an "old-stone savage armed."

Primary Symbol:

The primary symbol in "Mending Wall" is the wall itself. The speaker and his neighbour meet to mend and reconstruct this wall, as they do each year, and they engage in a conversation about the real purpose of the wall. His neighbour believes that the wall, and therefore physical divisions, are necessary to maintain peace. By clearly marking the divisions of their properties, the neighbour believes that they will be able to avoid future conflicts.

The speaker doesn't agree, believing instead that the wall is pointless. The wall divides the speaker's apple orchard from his neighbour's pine trees; the apple trees are not going to cross the property lines, anyway. Yet his neighbour simply repeats an old adage in response to this observation, reminding the speaker that "good fences make good neighbours."

This demonstrates that his need for division is based in tradition and without much thought about the need for those barriers. The wall is symbolic of all the ways humans divide themselves, questioning whether those divisions are successful in maintaining a sense of peace or if the walls themselves represent a sense of cynicism about coexisting with others peacefully.

It is interesting that the speaker grows apple trees. Apples are often symbolic of knowledge, which symbolizes the speaker's sense of wisdom in this conversation. Instead of blindly accepting tradition, he questions whether he and his neighbour benefit from their continual efforts to maintain a division between them.

The pine tree often symbolizes kinship and peace in literature. The neighbour's property is covered in pines. He is focused exclusively on maintaining peace through divisions, believing that his relationship with the speaker depends on clear barriers. He means no ill will toward the speaker and instead focuses on making steady progress through their efforts to reconstruct the deteriorating segments of their wall.

The speaker reflects that this yearly activity is an "out-door game / One on a side." This is symbolic of the outcome of divisions, alluding to the fact that games create both winners and losers.

The symbolism in the poem raises questions about the "walls" in our societies but allows the reader to draw their own conclusions regarding the need for those divisions.

Major Symbols:

The major symbols in "Mending Wall" are the stone wall and the "fences" spoken of by the neighbouring farmer: "He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbours.'" Each slightly different from the other, both symbolize the artificial and deliberately constructed barriers humans seem inevitably to erect between themselves.

There are two attitudes toward these barriers conveyed in the poem. The first is that of the speaker, who seems to have a tolerant, amused attitude, although, being the poetic soul he is, his amusement is soon off-set by contemplative musings. The second attitude is that of the neighbour, who seems to have a serious, dutiful, no-nonsense attitude, which remains undeterred when the speaker tries to engage him in riddles about the superfluity of walls:

> Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
> If I could put a notion in his head:
> "Why do they make good neighbours?...
> [...]
> ...I'd ask to know
> What I was walling in or walling out,..."

Another important symbol is the twice-said "Something there is that doesn't love a wall...," which is philosophically off-set by the twice-said "Good fences make good neighbours." Frost's metaphysically speculative observation of the "something" that doesn't love a wall can be taken literally as illustrated in the second line, which describes ground heaves of winter's frozen earth [today in New England, brightly coloured strings are stapled to utility poles warning drivers of "Ground Heave," which can buckle roads up into ridges one or even two feet high]: "That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,...." The symbolic meaning of this "something" relates to the paradoxical desire in humans for psychological and emotional intimacy even while erecting barriers to such intimacy: "something" is the hesitance to be known paradoxically opposing the desire to be known.

Secondary Symbols:

There are secondary symbols in "Mending Wall." Some are "spills" and "gaps," paradoxically symbolizing either (a) damage leading to vulnerability, such as hunters (symbolizing careless, destructive people) in pursuit of symbolically innocent rabbits, or (b) openings leading to opportunities, such as are created by "something," perhaps an inner "ground-swell" of psychological expansion. Another symbol is "spring mending-time," symbolic of a cyclical opportunity for renewal that continually offers new chances at the psychological and emotional intimacy desired (and, from the mending wall neighbour, continually resisted).

Another significant symbol is the place, a specific section along the neighbour's wall, where there is no need for a wall: "There where it is we do not need the wall." This place symbolizes a recurring opportunity between people to find the desired connectedness, perhaps in ever-present social situations in which renewal of opportunity is present on a recurring basis.

The Wall/Fences:

The wall is the shining star of this poem. It unites our speaker and his neighbour, but separates them as well. As we hear the neighbour speak the proverb twice ("Good fences make good neighbours"), we start to consider all of the wall-like structures in our life: fences, gates, boundaries, lines, etc. The wall serves as a canvas upon which a lot of complex ideas about the ways in which people, and their relationships with others, are painted and discussed.

• Line 13: The wall is ironic because, even though it separates the speaker from his neighbour, it also brings them together every year.

• Line 14: "The wall" is present throughout the poem as an extended metaphor for the division that exists between the speaker and his neighbour.

• Line 16: "To each" is a parallelism, as its repetition emphasizes the fact that the speaker and his

neighbour are on opposite side of the wall.

• Line 21: "Another kind of out-door game" becomes a metaphor for the wall-mending process

• Line: 27: The proverb "Good fences make good neighbours" is also a cliché; we hear it all the time.

• Line 27: The proverb "Good fences make good neighbours" is a paradox when you contrast it with the first words of the poem, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall." In the first case, barriers are good things; in the second, they are not.

• Line 35: "Offence" is a pun – it sounds like "a fence."

Nature and Tradition:

Nature seems to act as the third wheel in this poem – the silent character swirling around the speaker and his neighbour. Although he doesn't explicitly describe the landscape, we see it very clearly, and we seem to know what the seasons are like in this part of the world. Similarly, tradition seems to be the silent subject over which the speaker and his neighbour wrestle. The neighbour upholds his ancestors' way of life, while our speaker questions this philosophy.

• Line 5: "Hunters" are a metaphor both for the speaker and for us (the readers), all of whom try to get at something (even if we don't know exactly what that something is).

• Line 25: The apple trees are momentarily personified, as the speaker claims that they will never wander across and eat the pine cones on his neighbour's property.

• Line 51: The speaker uses a simile and likens his neighbour to "an old-stone savage armed," or a caveman ready for battle.

Form and Meter

Blank Verse:

Frost writes this poem in blank verse, meaning that it doesn't rhyme (sad), but it does have interesting structure stuff going on. The poem loosely follows an iambic pentameter structure. Let's get our hands dirty and break down this architecture. Counting is always a good way to begin. We know that the poem has 46 lines, making "there where it is we do not need the wall" (line 23) the dead centre of the poem, which is the exact point at which we figure out that our speaker isn't so gung-ho about the wall that he mends.

The majority of the lines in this poem have 10 syllables (in true iambic pentameter fashion), but we can find ten lines which have eleven syllables. When we encounter these lines, they momentarily throw our internal rhythm off kilter, and make us pay extra attention to the lines themselves. An example of this comes in line 8, when the speaker says, "But they would have the rabbit out of hiding." The eleventh syllable here seems to parallel the actual act of trying to force a bunny out of

his hole. The last syllable of this line falls off the edge of the poem in the same way that a bunny falls out of its hiding place when it's pursued by ferocious dogs.
Frost repeats two lines in this poem. Can you tell which lines they are? You guessed it: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall," and "Good fences make good neighbours." The repetitions of these lines, as well as the repetition of certain phrases throughout the poem, emphasize the whole "this is my side of the argument, and that's your side of the argument" theme. The poem is not broken into stanzas, which makes the poem itself look visually like a rock wall turned on its side. We can see the "gaps" in the wall when we look at the way that the line endings form an imperfect line all the way down the page.

What's Up With the Title?

The title of this poem may be the key to its interpretation. The title is not, as it is often mistaken to be, "The Road Less Travelled," but is "The Road Not Taken." If the title were "The Road Less Travelled," the poem would have a stranger focus on nonconformity – taking the path that others don't take. But the title "The Road Not Taken" focuses the poem on lost opportunities – the road that the speaker did not take.
The poem shows considerable ambivalence about which road is less travelled – one moment, one is more grassy, the next, they're both equally covered with fresh leaves. It seems that, on this autumn morning, neither road looked worn, regardless of what the speaker may say when he tells the story years from now.
But the speaker made a choice, and took a path. In taking that path, he gave up his chance to take the other one. Metaphorically, this means that the speaker is reflecting on his life choices, and how they are going to affect his life. What could have happened if he made a different choice? What his life would have been like?
More than anything in the text of the poem, this title hints that the poem is about lost opportunities, and the complexities of choices, not just choosing the path that is fresh and new.

Central Idea of Mending Wall:

The wall between the lands of two farmers is broken down by some unknown force every spring and they must rebuild it. The poet himself does not want the wall there and tries to convince his neighbour of the same. However, his neighbour is sure that fences are required to maintain peaceful relations with neighbours.

Themes of the Poem

Hints about the perpetrator:

Though Frost never names the person or thing that breaks down the wall repeatedly, he does leave ample hints about the true identity of the perpetrator. The culprit in question is the poet himself. The first hint about this is given in line 2 when he uses the phrase "frozen-ground-swell". Another tern for this phenomenon is frost heave. Frost is also the poet's own surname. Again, towards the end of the poem, he talks about elves. Now elves are known to be mischievous in nature. The poet also says that springtime has brought about the mischief in himself. So he has become elf-like. However, he isn't exactly an elf; he doesn't have their pointy ears or their supernatural powers. He is a mere mortal and he doesn't actually have the courage to admit that it was he who broke down the

wall. That is why he would prefer it if his neighbour would come forward and accuse him of the same. If the neighbour were to do so, Frost would openly admit to his crime. Until the neighbour asks though, the poet will only try to convince him that the wall is unnecessary and hope he will agree not to rebuild it.

Savagery and darkness:

The poet says that his neighbour appears to be a savage from the stone age using the stones of the wall as weapons, and also that he has a kinship with darkness. Both savagery and darkness are meant to symbolize the small-mindedness of his neighbour. In the stone age, man was still uncivilized. The world had not yet come under his control and he felt that he had to jealously guard his few possessions from any creature that came his way or any force of nature that he is unaware of. That is why the stone age man fashioned weapons out of stone (not having discovered metals as yet) and used them in constant combat with anything he might be confronted with. The poet's neighbour also jealously guards his land and tries to keep out Frost from his property by building the stone wall, and Frost thinks that is most unjust of him. Frost also says that the darkness he notices in his neighbour is not the darkness of the shade of trees. Rather it is a darkness of the heart. He is not open-minded and generous like Frost. He does not believe that all men should interact with each other. He is determined to wall himself in and wall everyone else out.

The Tone of Mending Wall:

The poet's tone here is quite mysterious when he suggests that some natural or supernatural force is tearing down the wall without being seen or heard. However, this tone changes to one of mischief when he tries to convince his neighbour not to rebuild the wall. He could have been hostile towards his neighbour's stubborn refusal to listen to him, but he is not. Instead, he chooses to simply listen to his neighbour speak about the utility of fences and go about his own business every spring.

Man and the Natural World:

Our speaker takes great pains to describe the setting of this New England countryside. He tells us right off the bat, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall/ That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,/And spills the upper boulders in the sun," (lines 1-3). In doing so, he points a big, fat finger toward nature. Nature seems to be the unnamed culprit who, in addition to hunters, continues to destroy the wall. As the poem unfolds, we learn how spring (and all of its feverish weather and spirit of new life) makes our speaker a bit mischievous. We see in this poem the sharp contrast between the natural and the artificial, nature and man.

Tradition and Customs:

When the neighbour first says, "Good fences make good neighbours," we know that we've heard this saying before. When he echoes it at the end of the poem, we realize that this saying was passed down to our neighbour from his father. In this way, the neighbour represents tradition and custom, relying on the past to serve as his guide. The speaker describes his neighbour as "an old-stone savage," making us think of a Neanderthal or caveman. In so doing, our speaker seems to challenge old-school methods, and paints a picture of the wall as antiquated or uncivilized.

Poetic Devices in Mending Wall

Rhyme scheme:
The poet does not follow any identifiable rhyme scheme in this poem.
Rhetorical devices:
Apostrophe:
This rhetorical device is used when a poet addresses his or her words to an absent audience or even a non-living entity. In this poem, the poet uses the device of the apostrophe in line 19 when he and his neighbour tell the boulders to stay balanced even after they have turned around after completing the job of mending the wall made of those boulders. He again uses it in lines 30 – 35 when he speaks to his neighbour about the dispensability of the wall.
Personification:
This rhetorical device is used to bestow human qualities on something that is not human. In this poem, the poet uses the device of personification in lines 25 – 26 with respect to the apple trees in his orchard. He gives the apple trees the human abilities to walk and eat.
Epigram:
This rhetorical device is used to make a brief, interesting, memorable, and sometimes satirical statement. In this poem, the poet uses the device of epigram in lines 29 and 46 when he reports his neighbour's saying that good fences make good neighbours. This means that there is harmony in non-interference.
Simile:
This rhetorical device is used when an overt comparison is made between two different things. In this poem, the poet uses the device of simile in lines 39 – 41 when he compares his neighbour to a savage from the stone-age and also uses the word "like" while making this comparison.

Critical Analysis of Mending Wall:

Most of Frost's poems are simple at the surface and have a deeper layer of meaning beneath. "Mending Wall" is no exception. While the poet seems to be relating a simple tale of rebuilding a broken wall between the lands of two farmers, he is talking about a much larger and more profound subject – that of division between human beings. Writing as he did at the beginning of the 20th century, he was witness to the drawing of borders between nations. He knows that such borders are drawn to keep out immigrants, and for the security of the citizens of the respective nations. However, Frost believes that such reasons have no basis. Cultural intermixing is a good thing, according to Frost, and all nations should strive to acquaint themselves with the cultures of their neighbouring countries, he feels. Only then can cultural synthesis happen and great art be created. Art does not follow any borders or boundaries. The same issues are dealt with in American poetry, English poetry and European poetry as well. In a world of increasing division, Frost feels a kind of camaraderie with all those poets who are writing about the union of the human species all over the world. Like his neighbour, there are people who would do anything to keep out so-called intruders, and to protect their property with all their might, but Frost wants to convince all of them to demolish the walls they put up between themselves. He wants there to be an open dialogue between such people so that problems can be solved in unison to make the world a better place.

Conclusion:

“Mending Wall” is typical of Frost’s style of writing. It describes something simple only to preach something far more profound. Frost’s message about the dispensability of borders is an important one to be making in 1914 – the year the First World War started. His belief that all men should stand united is a message for all times and all seasons. The fact that he could couch such inspirational messages in such uncomplicated verses is what makes Frost one of the greatest American poets of all time.

Questions of Mending wall

What does the neighbour represent in mending wall?

The **wall** in the poem '**Mending Wall**' **represents** two view points of two different persons, one by the speaker and the other by his **neighbour**. Not only **does** the **wall** act as a divider in separating the properties, but also acts as a barrier to friendship, communication.

What is the something that doesn't love a wall What does it do in the poem?

Something there is that doesn't love a wall, That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it And spills the upper boulders in the sun, And **makes** gaps even two can pass abreast.

What is ironic about the speaker in Mending Wall helping to maintain the wall?

What is ironic about the speaker in "Mending Wall," by Robert Frost is that he helps **maintain the wall** but he sees no point in having a **wall**. One grows pine trees and the other apple trees, so there is no need to separate because, as the **speaker** says, "My apples will never get across and eat the cones under his pines."

Why does the speaker say something there is that doesn't love a wall?

The **speaker** of the poem says so because he has experienced that 'something' is there that causes the cold ground under the wall to swell and burst. According to the **speaker**, the nature breaks the wall because it **does** not like it to stay there.

What poetic devices are used in mending wall?

Analysis of Literary Devices in “Mending Wall”

Assonance: Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in the same line such as /e/ sound in “To please the yelping dogs.

Enjambment: Enjambment refers to the continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line, couplet or stanza such as,

What does elves mean in mending wall?

The **elves** I **mean** are the ones in “**Mending Wall**,” wherein Frost's speaker, walking the length of a crumbling fence with his hidebound neighbour, speculates about the forces that tear it down. “I could say '**Elves**' to him.” I love the idea of someone saying “**Elves**” to someone else; having the thought of it.

What does the Neighbour mean by good fences make good Neighbours?

What does '**Good fences make good neighbours**' **mean**? This **means** that it is **better** for people to mind their own business and to respect the privacy of others.

What is the something that doesn't love a wall?

Something there is that **doesn't love a wall**, That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it, And spills the upper boulders in the sun; And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

Does the wall separate the two neighbours or bring them closer together?

He hopes that his **neighbour** will come up with the idea himself, instead. d) **Does the wall separate the two neighbours or bring them closer together**? ? No, **it** brings the **two neighbours together**.
The **wall** served as an agent to **bring them closer** as they **would** meet there to mend **it** yearly.

What does the line and some are loaves and some so nearly balls?

What literary device is used in the quote? **loaves** and **balls** are metaphors for the stone wall. "He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbours. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall." This is repeated throughout the poem; therefore, what literary device is it an example of?

What is the irony in mending wall?

Perhaps the greatest **irony** in the poem "**Mending Wall** " is that the speaker continues to help rebuild the **wall** even as he realizes he disagrees with its presence. As the poem progresses, the speaker notes how all sorts of natural forces, like the ground and animals, conspire to take down the **wall** each winter.

What are the contrasting views presented in the poem Mending Wall?

A) The **poem**, " **Mending Wall**", deals with the two **contrasting views** of the **poet** and his neighbour. According to the **Poet**, fraternity and tolerance are the two important factors for leading a harmonious life. He doesn't like walls which separate one from another.

Who is the speaker in the poem Mending Wall?

The poem "Mending wall" by **Robert Frost** is about two rural neighbours that had a wall that separate them. The speaker is the apple orchard owner, as can be noted by the lines "He is all pine and I am apple orchard.

Who is the narrator in mending wall?

Ironically, while the narrator seems to begrudge the annual repairing of the wall, **Frost** subtly points out that the narrator is actually more active than the neighbour. It is the narrator who selects the day for mending and informs his neighbour across the property.

How does the poem's form relate to its meaning Mending Wall?

The **form** of "**Mending Wall**" by Robert Frost is stichic rather than stanzaic. The term "stichic" means that the **poem** consists of lines of equal length printed continuously rather than divided up into separate stanzas. The meter of the **poem** is blank verse.

What is the attitude of the speaker in mending wall?

Mending wall is a poetry about a **wall** between the territory of the **speaker** and his neighbour.
The **speaker's attitude** towards the **wall** is that it is unnecessary to have a **wall** that divides them. It is having a speculation wherein, being close-minded with each other is not an obstacle but an opportunity.

What is the setting for mending wall?

"Mending Wall" Setting

"**Mending Wall**" is set in rural New England (it was even first published in a book called North of Boston). Its two characters, the speaker and the neighbour, likely live in an agricultural community—though whether either is a farmer remains unclear.

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