Fire and Ice - [*Robert Frost*](https://www.dltk-kids.com/poems/frost/index.htm)

**Summary**

Robert Frost’s poem “Fire and Ice” is a strong symbolic poem where fire is used as the emotion of desire and ice, that of hatred. He has used the idea of two groups who have their own possible explanation for the end of the world. One is of the opinion that fire alone, can destroy each and every possibility of life on Earth while the other thinks that if ice as a result of extreme low temperatures could cover the earth’s surface, it would lead to the end of the world. Both the components are compared with self-destructing human emotions: desire and hatred. The poet is originally of the opinion that he has been very closely associated with the “fiery desires” and considers it capable of bringing human beings on the verge of destruction. Thus, he considers fire as more competent for destruction. But then he thinks that “icy hatred” is just as capable of ruining humans, though slowly and steadily. Therefore, if Earth was to end twice, ice would be just as good as fire. If fire would lead to rapid destruction, ice would lead to silent damage. Similarly, if fire is pure passion, ice is pure reason. Thus, the poem, very artistically, underpins the philosophy that we let our emotions rule us and if don’t control them they will surely bring us all on the verge of chaos.

***Poetic devices***

1.Symbolism----*Fire* symbolizes human desires, Icesymbolizes hatred

1. Anaphora------Some say (lines 1 & 2
2. Alliteration-*--S*ome *s*ay the *W*orld *w*ill

I hold *w*ith those *w*ho *f*avour *f*ire

1. Metaphor--- Fire (desire) Ice ( hate ) World ( life )
2. Imagery Fire , Ice , But if it to *perish*
3. Rhyme Scheme - abaa bcbcb
4. Antithesis--- a striking opposition of contrast of words, Fire and Ice (opposites)

8. Enjambment—Ex. Line 1,3 ,6 , 7 & 8

Message

Extreme human emotions are capable of terrible destruction. Only love , kindness , equality , and mutual understanding for one and all can help in establishing peace . World is transient so we should not be overwhelmed by desire ,greed ,conflict, hatred, coldness and intolerance instead maintain a balance and keep ourselves above all selfish matters .

Question and Answers

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?

A. 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?

A. 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?

A. The rhyme scheme of the poem is “abaa bcbcb”. 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.

**EXTRA QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (elaborate according to the marks)**

**Q1.** How has Frost brought out the contrasting ideas in the poem?  
**A:** ‘Desire’ propels us in hot pursuit of something, hence, it is compared with fire. ‘Hatred’ makes us cold towards other’s feelings. The coldness of ice can numb our senses. Similarly, the coldness of our hearts can numb our kindness. That is why ‘hatred’ has been compared with ice.

**Q 2.** Write down the two different views about the end of the world?

**A:** There is a debate that is going on about the end of the world. People say that the world will end in fire or in ice. World is transitory, nothing is perennial in this universe.

**Q 3.** Why does the poet hold with those who favour fire?  
**A :** The poet takes side with those who believe that the world will be destroyed by fire. Frost connects fire with desire. According to the poet, desire is powerful and would be a quick end. Moreover, the fact that he has had personal experience with desire leads him to first conclude that the world will end in fire.

**Q 4.** Write the sum and substance of the poem ‘Fire and Ice’.  
**A :** The crystal clear message that the poet is trying to give is that nothing in this world is eternal. Everything will perish either in fire or ice. We should, thus, not forget this supreme reality and keep ourselves above all selfish matters.

**Q 5.** Briefly write about the ideas about how the world will end. **[CBSE2016]**  
**A :** The world will end as a direct result of either fire or ice. Some scientists believed that the world would be incinerated from its fiery core, while others were convinced that the coming ice age would destroy all living things on the Earth’s surface.  
Frost introduces a more emotional side, associating desire with fire and hatred with ice. The poem, thus, does not allow for any other opinions in the black and white debate between fire and ice.

**Q 6.** To say that for destruction ice is also great for the poet, what does ‘ice’ stand for? How is it sufficient to bring destruction?     **[ CBSE 2014]**  
**A :** ‘Ice’ symbolises hatred. Hate is just as powerful as desire. While desire consumes quickly, hate can occur and linger in people’s minds and hearts for years and sometimes even lifetimes. Hate consumers the hater perhaps even more than the person or group hated and it can ruin lives. Hate can, thus, be very destructive and sufficient to bring destruction.

Q 7. Today’s world is conflict ridden. People fight over various issues and there is no peace in the world. Explain/Describe based on your reading of the poem ‘Fire’ and ‘Ice’.  
A : Hatred is a predominant issue in today’s world. Neighbour hates his neighbour, brother hates his brother. None is willing to forgive each other or tolerate each other. As a result of the hatred we live in a very fragmented world. If hatred continues to rule our lives and world, nothing will remain intact. All our achievements will perish and the world will come to an end. If we have to save the world we need to learn how to forget and forgive. For this we need to have enormous amount of love and compassion and be willing to tolerate the differences and learn to get along with each other.