

STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING

Robert Frost

About the Poet

Robert Frost (1874–1963) was a famous American poet whose poems are particularly concerned with real situations, the rustic life of the countryside and landscape using them to examine complex social and philosophical themes. His poetry elucidates his concept that a poem 'begins in delight and ends in wisdom'. Though they appear simple and straightforward, they are deeply meaningful. He struggled initially to get his work published in the US, resulting in his publishing his first collection of poetry, titled *A Boy's Will*, in England in 1913 with an introduction by Ezra Pound. He was awarded the Pulitzer prize for poetry four times. His well-known works are *North of Boston* (1914), *New Hampshire* (1923), *West-Running Brook* (1928), *A Further Range* (1936) and *Complete Poems* (1951).

About the Poem

'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening', written in 1922, presents a deceptively simple narrative—of the speaker stopping by some woods on a winter evening, and quietly looking at and appreciating the scenery around. The setting is lovely and peaceful and the speaker is tempted to stay back longer. But she/he realises that the journey has not ended and that she/he has to travel quite a distance before resting. The poem brings out the conflict between the demands of worldly responsibilities and the simple pleasures of gazing at a beautiful landscape.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN...

1. What are some promises or goals you want to keep/achieve? Why do you want to do these things? How would it make you feel to not achieve them? Why?

2. What according to you is the difference between leisure or 'chilling' and work?

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**¹ *unusual*
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his **harness**² bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the **sweep**³ *sound of wind*
Of easy wind and **downy flake**⁴ *soft snow*.

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.

Points to Ponder

There are many who read this poem as being about the beauty and ease that death offers and having to make a choice between surrendering to death or continuing with life and its responsibilities. It would be a useful exercise to think about what death means to you and what life means. Does life mean only responsibilities, goals and achievements? Or is there time to stop, think, enjoy the moment and just simply be?

¹ **queer**: strange and unusual

² **harness**: a set of leather straps and metal parts that are put around a horse's head and body so that the horse can be controlled

³ **sweep**: an easy, light movement

⁴ **downy flake**: flakes of snow which are soft, like feathers (down means very soft fine feathers)