

## Literary Analysis Workshop



FLORIDA

### SUNSHINE STATE STANDARD

#### Literary Analysis

**Benchmark LA.1112.2.1.7** Analyze, interpret, and evaluate an author's use of descriptive language (e.g., tone, irony, mood, imagery, pun, alliteration, onomatopoeia, allusion), figurative language (e.g., symbolism, metaphor, personification, hyperbole), common idioms, and mythological and literary allusions, and explain how they impact meaning in a variety of texts with an emphasis on how they evoke reader's emotions.

## Modernism

In 1860, most Americans lived their entire lives without using a powered machine of any sort. By 1940, nearly everyone used or owned radios, cars, telephones, or appliances. With the Industrial Revolution, the modern world had come into being. It was a world of contradictions: disillusion and hope, self-doubt and self-discovery, crumbling traditions and explosive creative energy. In response to these forces, there arose a literary and cultural movement known as **modernism**.

### Making It New

Poet Ezra Pound is credited with bringing the techniques of literary modernism to the United States in the early 20th century. He urged his literary colleagues to “make it new”: to experiment with literary forms, subjects, themes, and structure. The result of this experimentation was a diverse flowering of literary achievement, which became known as the modernist movement.

Though modernism as a literary movement had its seeds in the late 19th century, it did not flourish until the early decades of the 20th century and throughout World War II. Prose writers Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and Katherine Anne Porter and poets Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), and William Carlos Williams were part of a generation of writers who created new ways of writing to respond to the post-World War I realities and the loss of stability felt so strongly between 1914 and 1945.



Experimental photograph of Ezra Pound, 1916

### The Defining Features of Modernism

Modernism comprises a diversity of individual styles. Yet there are some common defining features of the literature that show a distinct break with the past.

- Modernists rejected traditional **subject matter** and **themes**. Instead of love, many modernists wrote of the inability to commit to, or even communicate with, others. For most modernists, nothing lasted, and therefore themes frequently focused on impermanence and change.
- Instead of “heroes” who stood for the values of society, modernists focused on alienated individuals. The **protagonist** of T. S. Eliot’s poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (page 930) is no heroic explorer but an insecure, lonely man who is consumed by self-doubt.

- Modernists revealed important emotions and ideas with **understatement** and **irony**. They no longer felt confident directly stating universal truths in their works as the romantics and transcendentalists had before them.
- Rather than directly state meaning, modernists typically used **symbols** and **images** to suggest meaning. The speaker in Frost's "Acquainted with the Night" (page 898) never admits he's lonely or sad; the images, however, show this.

Although modernist writers often describe their characters' actions, feelings, and thoughts, they do not interpret them for the reader. A comparison of Ernest Hemingway's writing with Willa Cather's can help you see the difference between a modernist work and a more traditional one. Note how Cather's narrator in "A Wagner Matinee" (page 694) directly explains the significance of his relationship with his aunt.

I owed to this woman most of the good that ever came my way in my boyhood, and had a reverential affection for her. During the years when I was riding herd for my uncle, my aunt, after cooking three meals . . . and putting the six children to bed, would often stand until midnight at her ironing-board with me at the kitchen table beside her, hearing me recite Latin declensions and conjugations, gently shaking me when my drowsy head sank down over a page of irregular verbs.

—Willa Cather, "A Wagner Matinee"

In this excerpt from "In Another Country" (page 970), Hemingway's narrator, in contrast, does not explain the emotional significance of his relationships to the other characters, and the reader is left to infer how the characters feel about each other. Hemingway once explained such omissions this way: "I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it under water for every part that shows."

There were three boys who came each day who were about the same age I was. They were all three from Milan, and one of them was to be a lawyer, and one was to be a painter, and one had intended to be a soldier, and after we were finished with the machines, sometimes we walked back together to the Café Cova, which was next door to the Scala.

—Ernest Hemingway, "In Another Country"

## AMERICANS IN PARIS



French painter Henri Matisse was an inspiration to American writers in Paris.

At loose ends after World War I, many disillusioned Americans remained in Europe, often settling in the Left Bank district of Paris, where they were joined by numerous writers and artists. Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, and George Orwell were just some of the many writers who lived for a time in Paris during the 1920s. Many of the expatriate community saw it as a place where they could be more open to life—in a way that was impossible in the United States. For others, it served for inspiration: The simplicity of both Ernest Hemingway's and Gertrude Stein's styles is said to have been inspired by the art of French painters Paul Cezanne and Henri Matisse. Ironically, Paris became known as the place where American literary style was cultivated and crafted.

### Close Read

In Cather's passage, what details explain the aunt's character and the narrator's feelings about her? What do the details in Hemingway's passage reveal about his narrator?



FLORIDA

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**Benchmark LA.1112.2.1.3** Analyze, compare, evaluate, and interpret poetry for the effects of various literary devices, graphics, structure, and theme to convey mood, meaning, and aesthetic qualities.

#### NOTABLE QUOTE

*"Poetry is a way of taking life by the throat."*

#### FYI

Did you know that Robert Frost ...

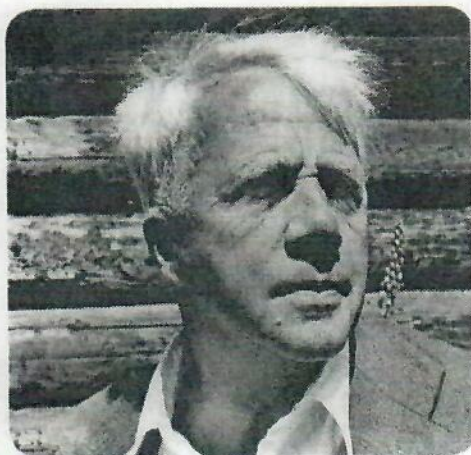
- was unable to read a poem at John F. Kennedy's inauguration because of bright sunlight and so recited one from memory?
- won 44 honorary degrees from prestigious universities but never earned a college degree himself?

### AuthorOnline

For more on Robert Frost, visit the [Literature Center](#) at [ClassZone.com](#).

## Selected Poetry

by Robert Frost



### Robert Frost

1874–1963

Robert Frost once remarked that his life's goal was to write "a few poems it will be hard to get rid of." Undoubtedly, he succeeded. Frost's best poems lodge themselves in the reader's imagination and refuse to go away. As a result, Frost is one of the most beloved American poets.

**Awakening to Poetry** Although Frost is associated with rural New England, he spent his first 11 years in San Francisco. Following his father's death in 1885, Frost's mother brought her two children east, eventually settling in the industrial city of Lawrence, Massachusetts. As a boy, Frost developed a passion for baseball and poetry. By the time he graduated from high school, he knew he would be a poet.

**Aimless Years** Frost's early manhood was nonetheless filled with change. He enrolled

at both Dartmouth College and Harvard University but did not remain at either place, tiring of the routine of college life. For several years he drifted working as a mill hand, a school teacher, and a reporter. One stabilizing event in his life was his marriage in 1895 to Elinor White, his high school sweetheart.

**Voice of New England** In 1900, Frost abandoned the indoor life of teaching for the outdoor life of farming. During the day Frost worked his poultry farm, and at night he wrote. The 11 years Frost spent farming were some of his most creative. Inspired by the rugged New Hampshire countryside and its plain-spoken inhabitants, Frost wrote poems that probed the mysteries of nature and the human heart.

**Literary Acclaim** At the age of 38, Frost moved his family to England, where he could "write and be poor." Less than two months later, a London publisher accepted the manuscript of *A Boy's Will* (1913) for publication. By the time Frost returned to the United States in 1915, he was hailed as a leading American poet.

In 1924, Frost's collection *New Hampshire* won a Pulitzer Prize, the first of four that he would receive. His public success, however, was overshadowed by personal tragedy. Between 1934 and 1940, Frost lost a daughter, his wife, and a son; another daughter was institutionalized for mental illness. As a result, his later poems often convey a bleak outlook on life.



**LITERARY ANALYSIS: FROST'S STYLE**

Some of Robert Frost's poems seem so simple, yet they move people deeply. Why? It certainly has something to do with his powerful choice of theme and subject matter, but it's also a matter of his unique **style**—the distinctive way in which he uses words and poetic devices. For one thing, he makes skillful use of traditional rhyme, meter, and stanza form. He also uses other elements in a distinctive way.

- **Diction**—word choice and syntax, or word order
- **Imagery**—the descriptive phrases that appeal to the senses
- **Mood**—the overall feeling or atmosphere that a writer creates for the reader (often created with imagery)

Notice these elements in the opening lines of "Out, Out—":

*The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard  
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,  
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.*

As you read these poems by Frost, pay close attention to his diction and his use of imagery and mood.

**READING SKILL: RECOGNIZE AMBIGUITY**

Many people approach poems like riddles; they are certain that the true meaning must lie in a single interpretation. This approach fails to take into account the **ambiguity** that lends richness and beauty to so many poems. Ambiguous works of literature contain more than one meaning; they are open to various, even opposing, interpretations, as in the opening lines of "Nothing Gold Can Stay."

*Nature's first green is gold,  
Her hardest hue to hold.*

Are these lines referring to a golden hue of green, or are they making the point that nature's first green is precious, like gold? You don't have to choose between these meanings; skilled readers of poetry recognize ambiguity and live with it, even enjoy it, as they read and consider a poem. As you read, record different interpretations of lines from each poem.

<i>"Acquainted with the Night"</i>	<i>"Nothing Gold Can Stay"</i>	<i>"Out, Out—"</i>
	<i>lines 1-2:</i> • golden shade of green • green is precious, like gold	

*What does it mean to be*  
**ALONE?**

**KEY IDEA** Does **solitude** make you lonely? Or is it precious to you? It's a powerful idea, being alone. Some people can't get enough of it, and others have it in painful abundance. In any event, it offers opportunity for reflection. In "Acquainted with the Night," Robert Frost explores one person's emotional reaction to being alone.

**QUICKWRITE** What images and feelings does the word *solitude* evoke in you? Write a short poem describing a moment alone.



# Acquainted with the Night

Robert Frost

I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
5 I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
When far away an interrupted cry  
Came over houses from another street,

10 But not to call me back or say good-by; **A**  
And further still at an unearthly height  
One luminary<sup>1</sup> clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.  
I have been one acquainted with the night. **B**

## ANALYZE VISUALS

Notice the shadowy human figures in relation to other objects in the photograph. What mood is established by the **composition**, or arrangement of shapes? How do the figures appear in relation to each other? Explain.

## **A** FROST'S STYLE

Reread lines 7–10. In what way does line 7 set the stage for lines 8–10? Identify the **mood** evoked by the **image** of the interrupted cry.

## **B** RECOGNIZE AMBIGUITY

Reread lines 11–14. Identify at least two possible meanings of “the time was neither wrong nor right.” What does this proclamation suggest about the “luminary clock”? Explain.

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1. luminary: giving off light.

# Nothing Gold Can Stay

Robert Frost

Nature's first green is gold,  
Her hardest hue to hold.  
Her early leaf's a flower;  
But only so an hour.  
5 Then leaf subsides to leaf.  
So Eden<sup>1</sup> sank to grief,  
So dawn goes down to day.  
Nothing gold can stay. ©

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1. **Eden:** the biblical Garden of Eden, from which Adam and Eve were expelled for disobeying God.

## Literary Analysis

1. **Clarify** What does the speaker of the first poem mean when he says he's been "acquainted with the night"?
2. **Summarize** What does the speaker of "Acquainted with the Night" see and hear on his walk?
3. **Interpret Analogies** In "Nothing Gold Can Stay," how is the fate of a leaf similar to that of the Garden of Eden?



*Haystacks and Barn* (1909), George Wesley Bellows. Oil on canvas, 56.5 cm x 71.4 cm. © Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas/Bridgeman Art Library.

- © **FROST'S STYLE**  
What is the **mood** of this poem? Identify the **diction** or **imagery** that most strongly establishes this mood for you.

# “Out, Out—”

Robert Frost

The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard  
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,  
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.  
And from there those that lifted eyes could count  
5 Five mountain ranges one behind the other  
Under the sunset far into Vermont.  
And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled, **D**  
As it ran light, or had to bear a load.  
And nothing happened: day was all but done.  
10 Call it a day, I wish they might have said  
To please the boy by giving him the half hour  
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.  
His sister stood beside them in her apron  
To tell them “Supper.” At the word, the saw,  
15 As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,  
Leaped out at the boy’s hand, or seemed to leap—  
He must have given the hand. However it was,  
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand! **E**  
The boy’s first outcry was a rueful<sup>1</sup> laugh,  
20 As he swung toward them holding up the hand  
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep  
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—  
Since he was old enough to know, big boy  
Doing a man’s work, though a child at heart—  
25 He saw all spoiled. “Don’t let him cut my hand off—  
The doctor, when he comes. Don’t let him, sister!”  
So. But the hand was gone already.  
The doctor put him in the dark of ether.<sup>2</sup>  
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.  
30 And then—the watcher at his pulse took fright.  
No one believed. They listened at his heart.  
Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.  
No more to build on there. And they, since they  
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs. **F**

1. **rueful**: expressing sorrow or regret.

2. **ether**: a liquid used as an anesthetic. Its fumes cause unconsciousness when deeply inhaled.

## **D** FROST’S STYLE

Reread lines 1 and 7. What sound is imitated by the repetition of words in these lines? Consider Frost’s style here; how does this **imagery** contribute to the overall **mood**?

## **E** FROST’S STYLE

Reread lines 13–18. What does the **diction** in these lines suggest about the accidental meeting of the saw and the hand? Explain the **irony** in these lines.

## **F** RECOGNIZE AMBIGUITY

Identify the ambiguity in the last two lines of the poem. What does their **understatement** and lack of sentiment suggest about the survivors and their attitude toward the boy’s death?



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## Comprehension

1. **Clarify** What is the setting, including the time of day, of “Out, Out—”?
2. **Summarize** What happens to the boy?

## Literary Analysis

3. **Identify Rhymes** Examine the pairs of rhyming words in “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” What ideas do the rhymes help Frost convey about the nature of beauty?
4. **Examine Theme** “Out, Out—” provides a portrait of **solitude** even among family. Identify words and phrases in which Frost suggests the solitude of these characters in the face of tragedy. What theme emerges about human relationships?
5. **Interpret Allusion** The title of “Out, Out—” is an **allusion**, or indirect reference to a well-known person, place, or literary work—in this case, a famous speech in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (Act Five, Scene 5). How does the following quotation from *Macbeth* color your sense of Frost’s poem?

... *Out, out brief candle!*  
*Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player*  
*That struts and frets his hour upon the stage*  
*And then is heard no more.*

6. **Analyze Frost’s Style** Identify several lines in any one of the three poems where Frost’s **diction**, his use of **imagery**, and/or **mood** is particularly striking. Explain why you find it noteworthy and how Frost’s style helps deliver the poem’s message.
7. **Evaluate Ambiguity** Consult the chart in which you recorded different interpretations as you read. Identify the ambiguity that you found the most puzzling, contradictory, or profound. In your opinion, what does the ambiguity add to each poem? Explain.

## Literary Criticism

8. **Critical Interpretation** The literary critic and scholar Lionel Trilling hailed Frost for his “representation of the terrible actualities of life in a new way.” Apply this comment to the three Frost poems you have just read. What are the “terrible actualities of life” in each poem? What might be considered “new” or unusual about Frost’s portrayal of these realities? Explain.