

CHAPTER

01

The Road Not Taken

by Robert Frost



Central Idea of the Poem

In the poem 'The Road Not Taken', the poet describes a very common experience of making a choice. He recalls one such choice he made in the past while travelling from the forest. From the two paths that diverged in the forest, the poet chose the one that seemed to him to be less travelled. He states that his choice has had a significant impact in his life.

Through this choice, the poet highlights that our choice decides our future. The choices that we make have a huge impact on our future. If we make a wrong choice, we will regret it, but will not be able to go back to change it. So, we must be wise while making choices.

Explanation of the Poem

Stanza 1

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.

Word Meanings

Diverged – separated, **Yellow wood** – the leaves on the trees are yellow, suggesting it is the autumn season, **Undergrowth** – dense growth of plants and bushes

Explanation The poet has come to a forest in the autumn season when the leaves have turned yellow. The poet reaches a point where the two roads separated into two directions. The roads symbolise the two ways of life. The poet, as a traveller, knew that he had to make a choice as he cannot travel both the roads at the same time. So, he stood there for a long time and looked down on both the roads. The poet looked at the first road and found that it has a bent which was covered with small plants and bushes. Just like the poet, we also take decisions and make choices everyday. Thus, we must analyse the situation to make the correct choice.

Stanza 2

Then took the other, just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

Word Meanings

Fair – good/beautiful, Better claim – it seemed better and more impressive, Grassy – full of grass, Wanted wear – looked less worn out or used, Passing – on walking down.

Explanation The poet looked at the other road and decided to travel by it. According to him this road seemed better and more impressive as it was covered with grass. It was not walked over by many people. However, as the poet walked on the road for some distance he realised that both the roads have been walked over equally.

Stanza 3

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

Word Meanings

Equally lay – were equally covered, Trodden black – turned the path black by crushing the leaves, Way leads on to way – one thing leads to another.

Explanation The poet now says that both the roads were similar on that morning as no one has travelled on any of the roads. The leaves were still green and fresh as they have not been crushed by anyone while walking. The poet decides to travel the second road and kept the first one for some other day. However, the poet had a doubt if he could ever come back again to walk on the first road. As the poet knew that once he made a choice, he will move and take many more decisions and would not be able to come back to change his choice.

Stanza 4

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence;
Two roads diverged in a wood and
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Word Meanings

Sigh – A long deep breath here either of relief/satisfaction or regret. Ages and ages hence – many years in the future

Explanation In these lines, the poet talks about the consequences of the choice.

The poet states that sometime in future, he will remember the day he made the choice. He would be telling about his decision with a sigh either with relief or regret (relief of making the right choice or regret of making the wrong choice).

He would tell that from the two roads that went into the forest, he took the less travelled one and the choice had made a significant impact on his life.

Poetic Devices Used in the Poem

- **Assonance** It is the repetition of vowel sounds in nearby words.

Line 1 Two roads diverged in a yellow wood.
(The 'o' sound is repeated in 'roads' and 'yellow').

- **Personification** A figure of speech which is used to make an inanimate object or animals/birds look or feel human.

Line 8 Because it was grassy and wanted wear.
(The path 'wanted' wear; wanting is a human need.)

- **Imagery** Imagery means to use figurative language to represent objects, actions and ideas in such a way that it appeals to our physical senses.

Line 1 Two roads diverged in a yellow wood.

Lines 11-12 And both that morning equally lay/in leaves no step had trodden black.

In both these lines, the words create an image or picture in the minds of the reader.

- **Metaphor** A device which compares two things or qualities which are unlike.

The poem as a whole is a metaphor, because the poet is metaphorically comparing the paths in the wood to the choices one must make in life.

- **Symbolism** A figure of speech wherein symbols are used to represent ideas or qualities.

Line 5 "Undergrowth" Undergrowth here is symbolic of the unknown and uncharted, unexplored world.

NCERT FOLDER

(Here we have covered questions given in the NCERT textbook along with their answers.)

I. Thinking about the Poem (Page 16)

- 1 Where does the traveller find himself? What problem does he face?

Ans. The traveller finds himself at a place where two roads diverged into two directions. He faces a problem of making a choice. He cannot decide which road to take to continue his journey, because it is not possible for him to travel in both directions at the same time.

- 2 Discuss what these phrases mean to you.

- (i) a yellow wood
- (ii) it was grassy and wanted wear
- (iii) the passing there
- (iv) leaves no step had trodden black
- (v) how way leads on to way

Ans. (i) A Yellow wood refer to the forest in the autumn season.
(ii) This conveys that the road was full of grass and nobody had used it either or it was used by less people.
(iii) The use of the road by people passing through the forest.
(iv) The leaves had not become black because no one has walked on them.
(v) This means how one road (symbolic of choice) leads to another road.

- 3 Is there any difference between the two roads as the poet describes them

- (i) in stanzas two and three?
- (ii) in the last two lines of the poem?

Ans. (i) In stanza two, the poet explains that the only difference between the two roads was that the road that he took had a better claim or looked more impressive because it was covered with grass and looked as if it had not been much walked over. However, at the end of the stanza, he says that both roads had been almost equally worn down by people walking on them.
In stanza three, the poet says that on that morning, both the roads were equally covered with leaves and that no person had stepped on them.

(ii) In the last two lines of the poem the poet says (probably many years later in future that there was a difference between the two roads, because he took the road that was less travelled and that made all the difference to his journey and in his life.

- 4 What do you think the last two lines of the poem mean? (Looking back, does the poet regret his choice or accept it?)

Ans. The last two lines of 'The Road Not Taken' brings out the theme of the poem. The lines convey that the poet had made a choice and his choice had a significant impact on his life. He had accepted his choice and had moved on in his life.

II. Thinking about the Poem (Page 16)

- 1 Have you ever had to make a difficult choice (or do you think you will have difficult choices to make)? How will you make the choice (for what reasons)?

Ans. No, till now I have never been in a situation in which I had to make a difficult choice. Perhaps I am still too young to make an independent choice.

Yes, I think soon I will have difficult choices to make. After completing my general education, I will have to choose a profession. I will have many options before me. Then it will be difficult to make a choice between them. However, I will make my choice according to my capabilities and strong points at that time.

I will choose a path that gives me satisfaction and mental peace. I will not just join the rat race for money. During such situation, I will weigh the pros and cons of all the choices before making a decision. I may even consult my elders for my decision as I know that my choice will have a huge impact on my life.

- 2 After you have made a choice, do you always think about what might have been, or do you accept the reality?

Ans. After I have made a choice, I would accept the reality. Taking a decision sometimes makes our future. Reconsidering a decision or contemplating over it is not a positive approach towards life. Such thoughts never allow us to be happy with what we have gained from our decision. Therefore, I believe in sticking to my decisions.