**Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**, by Robert Frost

**In A Nutshell**

Maybe you've seen this little poem elegantly scrawled on a gift card. Perhaps your favorite teacher recited it to you and your classmates with a chilling, gravelly voice. Or perchance you simply came across it once upon a time and can't seem to get it out of your head. No matter what, we're willing to bet big money that you and this poem are already friends.

Robert Frost wrote "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" in 1922, two years before winning the first of his four Pulitzer Prizes. The poem tells the story of a man traveling through some snowy woods on the darkest evening of the year, and he's pretty much in love with what he sees around him. He's on his way back to town, but he can't quite tear himself away from the lovely and dark woods.

People love to talk about what this poem means. Some argue that it is simply a description of a man appreciating nature. Others would tell you that there is some heavy metaphor action going down, and that the poem is about death. And there are those who take it a step further and say that this poem addresses suicide. Nature-lovers see it as a piece that trumpets nature and that scorns civilization (take *that*, civilization!). You probably have your own idea of what this poem means. We at Shmoop have an inkling that the heart of this poem's awesomeness lies in how it *sounds* rather than in what it *means*, and so we're going to take some time to look at and listen to the sounds in this poem (see "Sound Check").
Robert Frost is a beloved American poet, and many people associate him with nature and with the New England landscape, because, well, he liked to write about nature and the New England landscape. He was born in San Francisco (land of the sourdough), but spent most of his years in snowy places like Massachusetts and New Hampshire (land of the maple syrup).

Frost is known for creating simple poems that can be interpreted on many different levels. He also loved to inject everyday, colloquial speech into his poems. He was big on sounds, often talking about how the sounds of words carry more meaning than the words themselves. Check it:

"What we do get in life and miss so often in literature is the sentence sounds that underlie the words. Words themselves do not convey meaning, and to [. . . prove] this, . . . let us take the example of two people who are talking on the other side of a closed door, whose voices can be heard but whose words cannot be distinguished. Even though the words do not carry, the sound of them does, and the listener can catch the meaning of the conversation. . . . [T]o me a sentence is not interesting merely in conveying a meaning of words. It must do something more; it must convey a meaning by sound." (Source)

So, if we follow Mr. Frost's advice, we shouldn't be so concerned with what this poem means as concerned with how it means. Let's warm up our vocal chords and perk up our ears, because something tells us we're going to be reciting and listening to "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" until the wee hours of the night.

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Big Picture Study Questions

1. Why do you think Frost uses the word "woods" instead of "forest"? How are these two words different from one another?

2. Why does our speaker worry so much about who owns the woods?

3. Many people have criticized Frost for being too concerned with the past or with things that have nothing to do with the modern world (like blenders, radios, and TV). Do you agree with this criticism? Can you relate to this poem?

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