### The Road Not Taken

### Complete Text

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth; 5  
  
Then took the other, as 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, 10  
  
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. 15  
  
I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference. 20*

### Summary

The speaker stands in the woods, considering a fork in the road. Both ways are equally worn and equally overlaid with un-trodden leaves. The speaker chooses one, telling himself that he will take the other another day. Yet he knows it is unlikely that he will have the opportunity to do so. And he admits that someday in the future he will recreate the scene with a slight twist: He will claim that he took the less-traveled road.

### Form

“The Road Not Taken” consists of four stanzas of five lines. The rhyme scheme is ABAAB; the rhymes are strict and masculine, with the notable exception of the last line (we do not usually stress the *-ence* of *difference*). There are four stressed syllables per line, varying on an iambic tetrameter base.

### Commentary

This has got to be among the best-known, most-often-misunderstood poems on the planet. Several generations of careless readers have turned it into a piece of Hallmark happy-graduation-son, seize-the-future puffery. Cursed with a perfect marriage of form and content, arresting phrase wrought from simple words, and resonant metaphor, it seems as if “The Road Not Taken” gets memorized without really being read. For this it has died the cliché’s un-death of trivial immortality.

But you yourself can resurrect it from zombie-hood by reading it—not with imagination, even, but simply with accuracy. Of the two roads the speaker says “the passing there / Had worn them really about the same.” In fact, both roads “that morning lay / In leaves no step had trodden black.” Meaning: **Neither Of The Roads Is Less Traveled By**. These are the facts; we cannot justifiably ignore the reverberations they send through the easy aphorisms of the last two stanzas.

One of the attractions of the poem is its archetypal dilemma, one that we instantly recognize because each of us encounters it innumerable times, both literally and figuratively. Paths in the woods and forks in roads are ancient and deep-seated metaphors for the lifeline, its crises and decisions. Identical forks, in particular, symbolize for us the nexus of free will and fate: We are free to choose, but we do not really know beforehand what we are choosing between. Our route is, thus, determined by an accretion of choice and chance, and it is impossible to separate the two.

This poem does not advise. It does not say, “When you come to a fork in the road, study the footprints and take the road less traveled by” (or even, as Yogi Berra enigmatically quipped, “When you come to a fork in the road, take it”). Frost’s focus is more complicated. First, there *is* no less-traveled road in this poem; it isn’t even an option. Next, the poem seems more concerned with the question of how the concrete present (yellow woods, grassy roads covered in fallen leaves) will look from a future vantage point.

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Introduction to the Poem

*In the poem - ‘The Road Not Taken’, the road symbolizes our life. The poet says that the path that we don’t choose in our life is ‘the road not taken’. He describes his feelings about that choice that he had left in the past. The path which we have chosen, decides our future, our destination. The important message that the poet wants to give is that the choice that we make has an impact on our future and if we make a wrong choice, we regret it but cannot go back on it. So, we must be wise while making choices.*

Poem and Explanation



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;

diverged: separated and took a different direction

yellow wood: a forest with decomposing leaves

undergrowth: dense growth of plants and bushes means the forest)

*Once the poet was walking down a road and then there was a diversion, there were two different paths and he had to choose one out them. The poet says that as he was one person, he could travel on one road only. He had to choose one out of these two roads Yellow wood means a forest with leaves which are wearing out and they have turned yellow in colour – the season of autumn. It represents a world which is full of people, where people have been living for many years. They represent people who are older than the poet. The poet kept standing there and looked at the path very carefully as far as he could see it. Before taking the path, he wanted to know how it was. Was it suitable for him or no. He was able to see the path till from where it curved after which it was covered with trees and was hidden. It happens in our life also when we have choices, we have alternatives, but we have to choose only one out of them, we take time to think about the pros and cons, whether it is suitable for us or not and only then, we take a decision on what path we should choose.*

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.

fair: As good as the other one,

claim: Better option

grassy: unused

wanted wear: had not been used

*The poet kept on looking at one path for a long time to check if it is the right path for him or not and them he decided and started walking on another path because he felt that the both paths were equally good. He says just as fair, so, he felt that both paths were equally good and started walking on one of them. He adds that maybe he felt that the path was better for him so he chooses it as it had grass on it which means that it was unused. Not many people had walked on this path earlier that is why this path was grassy. ‘And wanted wear’ means that it was not walked over by many people. After he walked on the path for some distance, he realized that both the paths had been worm out the same way. Both the paths were similar and worn out.  Even in our life, we take any path or option but all of them have the same benefits, disadvantages, problems, challenges and we must face them. We think that we are choosing a better option, but it is not that way.*

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.

trodden means walked over.

*The poet says that both the paths were similar that morning. Both had leaves on them and no one had stepped on them as they were still green in colour. He decided that that day he would take one path and keep the other path for another day, although he knew that one way leads on to another way. He knew that he could not go back on the choice that he had made. Similarly, even in our life once we choose an option, we must keep on moving ahead with that option and we never get a chance to come back and take the other option that we had left earlier.*

Stanza 4

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence;

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —

I took the one less travelled by,

And that has made all the difference.

sigh: deep breath

hence: here, in the future

*He says that in the future, he will take a deep breath and say that once upon a time, he had reached such a point in life that there were two options for him and he travelled on that road which had been travelled upon by lesser number of people. That decision of his decided his future. Similarly, in future, when you grow up, then you will say that once upon a time, when you were young, you had two options. The choice that you made, made you what you became of it. This is a very strong message for all the students - that you should be wise and be careful while making choices out of the options that you have in your life because your future depends on the choice that you make today.*

Literary Devices used in the Poem - The Road Not Taken

1.Rhyme Scheme: abaab

2.Symbolism: two roads which represents two or more choices in our life

3.Anaphora: ‘and’ repeated at the beginning of lines 2, 3 and 4

4.Alliteration: Wanted Wear ‘w’ sound is repeating

1. ‘first for’ – ‘f’ sound is repeating
2. ‘though, that’- ‘th’ sound is repeating

5.Repetition: ‘Ages’ is repeated. ‘Two roads diverged in a wood’- this sentence is repeated in stanzas 1 and 4.

The Road Not Taken Summary

The poet says that once, he was walking down the road and reached a fork. He could walk over one of the paths only. He took time to choose the right path. He inspected them to decide which was a better option and then chose the one which seemed less walked over. He kept the other one for some other day although he knew that he would never get the chance to walk over it. He would go further on the chosen path and not get a chance to go back on it. As he walked on the chosen path, he realized that both the paths were similar. He felt that his future depended on the choice that he made.

**Question and Answers**

1. Where does the traveler find himself? What problem does he face?

A. The traveler finds himself standing on a fork in the path. He is in a problem as he must choose one path and is unable to decide which one to choose.

2. Discuss what these phrases mean to you.

(i) a yellow wood

A. ‘Yellow wood’ refers to the forest which has withering leaves as in the season of autumn. It represents a world full of aging people.

(ii) it was grassy and wanted wear

A. It means that the path had a lot of grass on it. This means that it had not been walked over by many people. It had to be worn out by the steps of the people who walked on it.

(iii) the passing there

A. It means that when he walked over the path that he had chosen.

(iv) leaves no step had trodden black

A. It means that no one had walked over the leaves as they were still green. If they had been walked over, they would have turned black.

(v) how way leads on to way

A. It means that as we walk on a path, we come across more options and make choices further. We keep on walking ahead on that way.

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

(i) in stanzas two and three?

A. The two paths were similar. In the beginning, the poet felt that one of them was grassy and had not been walked over by many people, but when he walked on it for some distance, he realized that it was like the other road.

(ii) in the last two lines of the poem?

A. Here, again the poet talks of his initial decision when he thought that the roads were different and chose the one that had been walked over by a lesser number of people.