

THE POETIC JUSTICE SERIES
an autoSOCRATIC QUICK-START publication

Mending Wall

Robert Frost



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A Short Biography
Robert Frost



ROBERT FROST

1874-1963

4

FROM WEST TO EAST

San Francisco to Massachusetts

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco in 1874.

Frost was only 11 when his father, William Prescott Frost, Jr., died in 1885.

Living in California on the west coast, the Frost family was without a husband / father / male-figure.

Robert Frost's grandfather, William Frost, Sr., ran a mill in New England on the east coast.

The grandfather brought the family east to grow up in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

A POETIC FARMER

Mixing Agriculture and Literature

Robert Frost had his first poem published in 1894, at age 20.

Frost would marry his sweetheart, Elinor, in 1895.

The married couple lived in Lawrence, MA, with dreams of literary greatness.

Frost's grandfather purchased a farm for them in Derry, NH, as a wedding present, shortly before he died.

The married couple became farmers in Derry, New Hampshire.

FARM LIFE

Learning While Working

Frost was an unsuccessful farmer for several years.

While farming, Frost fell in love with nature, and noticed everything.

Though unsuccessful at farming, the experience provided him material to write good poetry about.

His neighbor, Napoleon Guay, had a springtime ritual of fixing (mending) the stone wall that served as the boundary line between their properties.

Frost would come to write a poem, **MENDING WALL**, about this tradition.

THE CHOICE

Following One's Dreams

While unsuccessful at farming, Frost also taught English for several years and also continued to write poetry.

Frost realized his real love was poetry, but he could not get published in America.

Frost realized one cannot serve two masters, and wanted to pursue poetry full time.

England was a hotbed for literary and poetic writing and publishing.

"Two Roads Diverged. He took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."
The married couple sold the farm in Derry, NH, and moved to England in 1912.

MISSING HOME

Writing About Things That Matter To Us

Frost moved to England in 1912 to write poetry and get published.

While in England, Frost missed the ritual of mending the stone wall with his neighbor, Napoleon Guay.

Frost wrote "Mending Wall".

The farming experience provided him material to write good poetry about.

"Mending Wall" is mostly a literal but poetic recollection of his experience with his neighbor.

Mending Wall
The Poem

Mending Wall

Robert Frost

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.

To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
‘Stay where you are until our backs are turned!’
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, ‘Good fences make good neighbors’.
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
‘Why do they make good neighbors? Isn’t it
Where there are cows?
But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I’d ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me~
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good
neighbors."

Mending Wall
An Analysis

THE WALL

Why is There a Wall in the First Place?

Farmland is typically littered with rocks of all sizes.

Rocks interfere both with growing things and the plows that plow the field.

To grow and plow the land requires one to remove the rocks.

Property owners like to protect their property lines.

The moved rocks can serve as a boundary between adjoining properties.

A BROKEN WALL

The Wall Needs Fixing

The frozen-ground swells under the wall, and spills the upper boulders in the sun.

Hunters come and leave not one stone on another, to have the rabbit out of hiding.

The wall separating my field and my neighbor's field annually crumbles.

Both neighbors want a good wall, and enjoy the friendly get-together.

Come spring, both neighbors meet to "mend the wall".

DIFFICULT TIMES

As We Fix the Wall

As we repair the fence, we have to use a "spell to make the rocks balance".

As we repair the fence, we wear our fingers rough with handling the rocks.

Mending the wall is not only hard to do, it's hard work!

The status-quo is often challenged when things are difficult.

I start to wonder, "Why do we need a wall between my neighbor and me?"

MY EUREKA MOMENT

We Don't Need to Mend the Wall!

Mending the wall is not only hard to do, it's hard work!

The wall serves no purpose: On his side of the wall is "all pine and I am apple orchard."

I realize "there where it is we do not need the wall."
"Something there is that doesn't love a wall".

Both neighbors want a good wall, and enjoy the friendly get-together.

I must tell my neighbor we do not need the wall!

NO BUY-IN

My Neighbor Doesn't Want to Hear About My Discovery!

I must tell my neighbor we do not need the wall!

My neighbor has not done any thinking on the need for the wall.

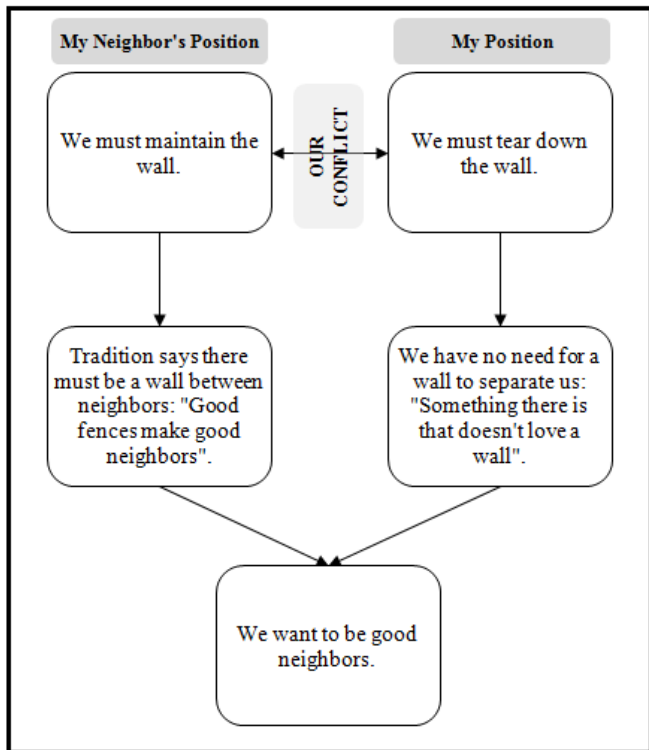
My neighbor "will not go behind his father's saying, and he likes having thought of it so well".

My neighbor only repeats the tired refrain: "Good fences make good neighbors".

My neighbor is not interested in change.

CAUGHT IN A BIND

My Neighbor VERSUS Me?



Mending Wall
Metaphorically

STATUS QUO

When One Mindlessly Protects the Status Quo

In Frost's Mending Wall, as two neighbors annually fix the wall between them, one has a breakthrough idea.

The neighbor doesn't want to hear it, parroting "Good fences make good neighbors" because that's what he's heard his whole life.

"Good fences make good neighbors" means blind adherence to the status quo.

The status quo is blindly accepted everywhere.

THE STATUS QUO METAPHOR:
"Good _____ make good _____."

LAMENT

You See Something Continually Odd or Wrong, But Unchanged

In Frost's Mending Wall, as two neighbors annually fix the wall between them, one starts to think about why they do this every year.

Looking at the failing wall serving no purpose, he asks, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall".

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall" means "when something's wrong, somebody's telling us something".

There are many instances when things continue to go wrong.

THE LAMENT METAPHOR:
'Something there is that doesn't love a _____.'

POT-STIRRER

You're Nothing But a Trouble-Maker!

In Frost's Mending Wall, as two neighbors annually fix the wall between them, one has a breakthrough idea.

He knows his neighbor will be indifferent to it, but brings it up anyway, as "Spring is the mischief in me".

"Spring is the mischief in me" means "I like to stir the pot".

The pot needs stirring in many instances.

THE POT-STIRRER METAPHOR:
"____ is the mischief in me."