

Area of Study – Response Sheet

Title: The Road Not Taken

Form: Poem

Composer: Robert Frost

Date: 1916

Context & Values:

As the poem was written in 1916, it was written in the middle of World War One about the time that America was coming in to the war. It has been suggested that the fork in the road was representational of the choice to join the army, a choice that could not be taken back.

However, if one examines Robert Frost's biography, another inspiration for the poem emerges. In 1911, just five years before the poem was written, Frost faced a decision in his life that he regarded as "the hardest" of his life. He had to decide whether or not to sell his recently inherited dairy farm and move to London to pursue his career. He chose to sell the family farm and later on in life reflects on that decision with some regret, despite the move launching his career.

Concepts or Ideas Conveyed about Journeys:

The main concept explored in *The Road Not Taken* is that the journey of life is made up of choices, or crossroads, which must be weighed up and decided upon. Frost proposes the theme that personal choices direct our future, but are not always as easy or clear cut as they first seem.

This is backed up by the fact that the choice is presented in the first line, when "two roads diverged in a yellow wood", straight away putting the choice up front. The rest of the poem is concerning making that choice and the consequences that occur as a result of that choice. He presents the idea that decisions are inevitable, they cause conflict and lead to reflection.

Journey – Describe the nature of the journey; imaginative, physical or inner:

There are two themes concerning the nature of the journey conveyed in this poem. The first of which is the more literal meaning of the physical journey in which a traveller has come to an intersection in the road and must make a decision. Even in modern society, a 'road trip' is synonymous for freedom and a physical journey.

However, metaphorically speaking, the road is representational of the journey of life and the intersections and crossroads represent the choices and decisions we must make as a part of that journey. In that sense, *The Road Not Taken* leans towards being an inner journey although it is the combination of both that give *The Road Not Taken* its final intrigue, mystique and interest.

Language/filmic/visual/aural features:

Discuss how the composer conveyed the inner or physical or imaginative journey. Identify the feature, exemplify and explain how it conveys or creates the journey and extrapolate by discussing its impact on the responder. Draw comparisons/contrasts between this text and other texts you are discussing in your response. Include quotes from the text.

There are many features which help to convey the idea of both physical and inner journeys.

Supporting the argument of a physical journey is the use of very literal, road terms such as "roads", "travel" and "diverged." These terms help to give the impression of a literal, physical journey.

However, more effort has been made by Frost to give the poem a more metaphorical feel.

The first of these features is the fact that the entire poem is an extended metaphor in which the road is likened to life. This gives the whole poem the feeling that it is a part of something larger, symbolising little choices making up an entire life.

The fact that it is written in the first person also adds to its meaning of being an inner journey. By using the personal pronoun "I", the poet allows the journey to be much more personal between the poet and the responder, a feature reserved for inner journeys.

The tone also adds to the meaning throughout the poem. The tone is thoughtful and reflective, which shows the author's analysis of the decisions that he makes, another trait that is associated with the mind. This shows how we often reflect after a journey is complete.

Another quite ambiguous feature of the poem that suggests the theme of an inner journey is the two readings that can be concluded from the final statement. The final line "And that has made all the difference" leaves the reader pondering as to whether the difference was for good or bad. Even the most hardened language critics are unclear as to which is the dominant reading. This adds to the inner journey theme because there is only one person who knows the answer to that question, the author. If only one person has access to it then it is inside that person, hence an inner journey. One feature that helps add to this ambiguity is the dash in the last stanza which is probably representational of a sigh, suggesting reflection and possible disappointment at what 'might have been.'

This is backed up by the title, *The Road Not Taken*, which implies what 'might have been' rather than what did happen.

The rhyming pattern also helps to add to the meaning conveyed in the poem. The rhyming pattern of ABAAB helps give it a serious, measured and reflective feel as well as giving it a smooth flowing and rhythmical feel. This allows the journey to also be flowing and to continue progressing.

Another feature that helps to give the poem the feeling of an inner journey is the use of moods. Language is used to give the more personal feel of moods and feelings as the poet gives the poem a feeling of the 'softness of autumn.' This is shown in the lines "yellow wood", "leaves", "undergrowth," and "grassy".

All these features help to show that *The Road Not Taken* has themes lying in both the physical and inner journey genres.

Describe the journey and the consequences of the journey:

The journey is both literal and metaphorical.

It is literal in that it is a physical journey of a person travelling along a road and coming to an intersection in it. The traveller must then make a decision as to which road to take. A consequence of this journey is that you will go where that road takes you and there is not enough time to turn back and try the other route should the first fail.

In a more metaphorical sense, the journey is of a person travelling through life and being forced to make choices on regular occasions. A consequence of this is choices can't be unmade and that one choice leads on to another. Once a choice has been made, it is 'locked in' and life will continue to flow on from that point. We can no more unmake choices that go back in time, and that is a direct consequence of the choices we make throughout life.

Linking & Synthesising: Discuss what you have discovered or learned about physical, inner or imaginative journeys from the texts. Compare and contrast the texts.

Through the text, *The Road Not Taken*, it has once again been seen that a text does not necessarily have to be just physical, inner or imaginative but can be a mixture of two or more. *The Road Not Taken* is a mixture of both physical and imaginative journeys.

In this way it is similar to the cover of Victor Kelleher's novel, *The Ivory Trail*. *The Ivory Trail* is also both a physical and inner journey.

Many critics have also noticed the startling contrasts between Robert Frost's poem, *The Road Not Taken*, and the traditional Australian ballad by Geoff Mack, *I've been Everywhere*. In Frost's poem, the poem refers to 'what might have been' with the suggestive title of the road *NOT TAKEN*. While in *I've Been Everywhere* the focus is more on where the author has been rather than what they haven't done as is the case in Frost's poem.

Another contrast is the attitudes of the persona in each poem. While they both reflect on what has happened, the persona looks back with more regrets than his Australian counterpart who takes on a more boastful attitude with no regrets.

Overall, this text has used many features to convey the theme of journeys.