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### Robert Frost "Mending Wall"

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:

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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,

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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.

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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. 20

Oh, just another kind of outdoor 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 25

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 30

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 offense.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall, 35

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. 40

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.” 45

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### **Summary**

Every year, two neighbors meet to repair the stone wall that divides their property. The narrator is skeptical of this tradition, unable to understand the need for a wall when there is no livestock to be contained on the property, only apples and pine trees. He does not believe that a wall should exist simply for the sake of existing. Moreover, he cannot help but notice that the natural world seems to dislike the wall as much as he does: mysterious gaps appear, boulders fall for no reason. The neighbor, on the other hand, asserts that the wall is crucial to maintaining their relationship, asserting, “Good fences make good neighbors.” Over the course of the mending, the narrator attempts to convince his neighbor otherwise and accuses him of being old-fashioned for maintaining the tradition so strictly. No matter what the narrator says, though, the neighbor stands his ground, repeating only: “Good fences make good neighbors.”

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### **Form**

Blank verse is the baseline meter of this poem, but few of the lines march along in blank verse’s characteristic lock-step iambs, five abreast. Frost maintains five stressed syllables per line, but he varies the feet extensively to sustain the natural speech-like quality of the verse. There are no stanza breaks, obvious end-rhymes, or rhyming patterns, but many of the end-words share an assonance (e.g., wall, hill, balls, wall, and well sun, thing, stone, mean, line, and again or game, them, and him twice). Internal rhymes, too, are subtle, slanted, and conceivably coincidental. The vocabulary is all of a piece—no fancy words, all short (only one word, another, is of three syllables), all conversational—and this is perhaps why the words resonate so consummately with each other in sound and feel.



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## **Analysis**

This poem is the first work in Frost's second book of poetry, "North of Boston," which was published upon his return from England in 1915. While living in England with his family, Frost was exceptionally homesick for the farm in New Hampshire where he had lived with his wife from 1900 to 1909. Despite the eventual failure of the farm, Frost associated his time in New Hampshire with a peaceful, rural sensibility that he instilled in the majority of his subsequent poems. "Mending Wall" is autobiographical on an even more specific level: a French-Canadian named Napoleon Guay had been Frost's neighbor in New Hampshire, and the two had often walked along their property line and repaired the wall that separated their land. Ironically, the most famous line of the poem ("Good fences make good neighbors") was not invented by Frost himself, but was rather a phrase that Guay frequently declared to Frost during their walks. This particular adage was a popular colonial proverb in the middle of the 17th century, but variations of it also appeared in Norway ("There must be a fence between good neighbors"), Germany ("Between neighbor's gardens a fence is good"), Japan ("Build a fence even between intimate friends"), and even India ("Love your neighbor, but do not throw down the dividing wall").

In terms of form, "Mending Wall" is not structured with stanzas; it is a simple forty-five lines of first-person narrative. Frost does maintain iambic stresses, but he is flexible with the form in order to maintain the conversational feel of the poem. He also shies away from any obvious rhyme patterns and instead relies upon the occasional internal rhyme and the use of assonance in certain ending terms (such as "wall," "hill," "balls," "well").

In the poem itself, Frost creates two distinct characters who have different ideas about what exactly makes a person a good neighbor. The narrator deplores his neighbor's preoccupation with repairing the wall; he views it as old-fashioned and even archaic. After all, he quips, his apples



are not going to invade the property of his neighbor's pinecones. Moreover, within a land of such of such freedom and discovery, the narrator asks, are such borders necessary to maintain relationships between people? Despite the narrator's skeptical view of the wall, the neighbor maintains his seemingly "old-fashioned" mentality, responding to each of the narrator's disgruntled questions and rationalizations with nothing more than the adage: "Good fences make good neighbors."

As the narrator points out, the very act of mending the wall seems to be in opposition to nature. Every year, stones are dislodged and gaps suddenly appear, all without explanation. Every year, the two neighbors fill the gaps and replace the fallen boulders, only to have parts of the wall fall over again in the coming months. It seems as if nature is attempting to destroy the barriers that man has created on the land, even as man continues to repair the barriers, simply out of habit and tradition.

Ironically, while the narrator seems to begrudge the annual repairing of the wall, Frost subtly points out that the narrator is actually more active than the neighbor. It is the narrator who selects the day for mending and informs his neighbor across the property. Moreover, the narrator himself walks along the wall at other points during the year in order to repair the damage that has been done by local hunters. Despite his skeptical attitude, it seems that the narrator is even more tied to the tradition of wall-mending than his neighbor. Perhaps his skeptical questions and quips can then be read as an attempt to justify his own behavior to himself. While he chooses to present himself as a modern man, far beyond old-fashioned traditions, the narrator is really no different from his neighbor: he too clings to the concept of property and division, of ownership and individuality.

Ultimately, the presence of the wall between the properties does ensure a quality relationship between the two neighbors. By maintaining the



division between the properties, the narrator and his neighbor are able to maintain their individuality and personal identity as farmers: one of apple trees, and one of pine trees. Moreover, the annual act of mending the wall also provides an opportunity for the two men to interact and communicate with each other, an event that might not otherwise occur in an isolated rural environment. The act of meeting to repair the wall allows the two men to develop their relationship and the overall community far more than if each maintained their isolation on separate properties.

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### **Poetical Devices**

**Metaphor:** Examples of metaphors in the poem are listed below;

1. The 'wall' in the poem is a metaphor for two kinds of barriers- physical and mental.

\*Something there is that doesn't love a wall

\*And set the wall between us once again

\*We keep the wall between as we go.

2. In another metaphor, stone blocks have been compared to 'loaves' and 'balls.'

\*And some are loaves and some so nearly balls

We have to use a spell to make them balance.

### **Simile:**

Example of simile from the poem,-

"...I see him there

Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top

In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.."



In the above lines, Frost describes his neighbour who was holding a stone firmly in his hand and looked like some primitive man armed to fight.

**Personification:**

“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;”

In the above lines, an unseen force in nature has been personified. It is this force that breaks down the boundaries that man has created.

**Parallelism:**

It is a figure of speech that has a similar word order and structure in their syntax.

“To each the boulders that have fallen to each.”

Here, ‘to each’ is parallelism as it emphasizes that fact that the narrator and his neighbour are on the opposite sides of the wall.

**Pun:**

An example of Pun in the poem is “And to whom I was like to offence.” Here, the word ‘offence’ is a pun as it sounds like ‘fence.’

**Paradox:**

Frost’s poems are famous for juxtaposing the opposites for life. The poem has two famous lines which oppose each other.

“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall”



“Good fences make good neighbours.”

**Allusion:**

“Mending Wall” has an allusion to elves, the tiny supernatural creatures drawn from folklore and myth.

**Alliteration:**

The examples of alliteration in the poem are the following:

- \*We wear our fingers with handling them
- \*Before I built a wall
- \*What I was walling in or walling out.

**Symbolism:**

Frost’s poems are known for his distinctive use of symbols. These symbols enhance the significance and deeper meaning of the poem.

\*The fence symbolizes national, racial, religious, political and economic conflicts and discrimination which separate man from man and hinders the ways of understanding and cultivating relationships.

\*The dispute between the two neighbours symbolizes the clash between tradition and modernity. The young generation wants to demolish the old tradition and replace it with modernity while the old wants to cling on to the existing tradition and beliefs.

In “Mending Wall”, Frost has taken an ordinary incident of constructing or mending a wall between the his and his neighbour’s garden and has turned it into a meditation on the division between human beings.

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## Theme

The central theme is whether the wall is good or bad for the relationship between the two neighbors. In a larger context, the theme is about the effect of emotional and physical barriers. The speaker, initially, seems to think that the wall is inherently a detriment, unnatural, something that separates and therefore is a barrier to an open dialogue/relationship.

However, he does still see and converse with his neighbor and the wall does provide a sense of privacy which is not inherently bad. Also, there is the play on "mending" as both a verb and an adjective. As an adjective, the wall 'mends' their relationship by keeping them in communication albeit physically separated by the wall. As a verb, the act or ritual of the two neighbors getting together to "mend" the wall is an event that brings the two together.

And even though the speaker finds the wall unnatural, it is he who lets his neighbor know it is time to mend the wall. So, it is ambiguous as to whether he really doesn't want the wall there. His neighbor may be thinking the same thing. Do we need this wall? Does this ritual of gathering to mend the wall serve as our only means of communication? And if so, it is ironic that the ritual to mend this physical barrier is also a ritual of connection.

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