

talk
to
me!

LET'S TALK EMPOWERMENT. LET'S TALK ENGLISH

First Flight

Dust of Snow

1. Watch and listen to the poem

Click on the link below to watch a video of the poem being read. Note the pronunciations of the words and read along using the subtitles.

[\(79\) Dust of Snow - YouTube](#)

2. Background

Robert Frost was an American poet, famous for his seemingly simple poems that contained deep philosophical meanings, conveyed through imagery. In this poem, he uses two images, one of a crow, and the other of a hemlock tree. In Western cultures, both have negative associations. Crows have often been associated with death, disease, and bad luck. They are hated by farmers for stealing crops; city dwellers also find them a nuisance.

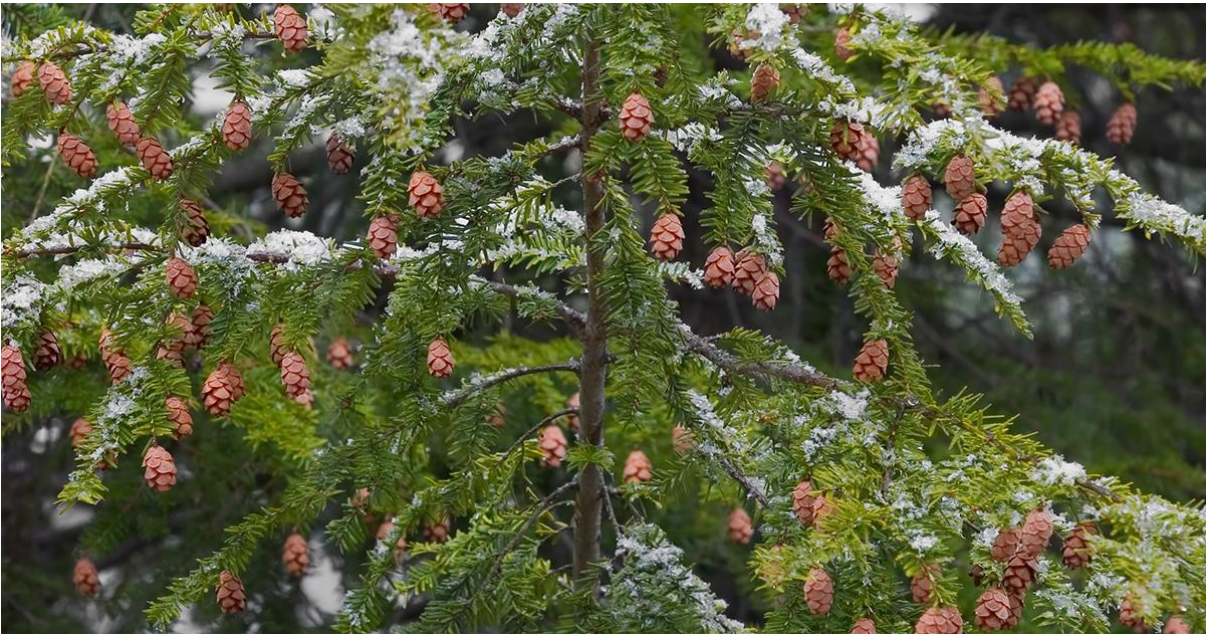
Hemlock is normally associated with poison, from a plant with small white flowers. Hemlock became famous because a great Greek Philosopher, Socrates (469-399BC) was sentenced to die by drinking the juice of the plant.

Here is a picture of the hemlock plant:



However, this poem refers to a hemlock tree, which is not poisonous. The names of the two plants are similar because their leaves smell the same when they are crushed. The hemlock pine forest is the most wide-spread habitat in New Hampshire, which is where Robert Frost lived.

Here is a picture of a hemlock tree with soft powdery snow on its branches:



It is easy to imagine that the snow would fall off the branch if it was shaken by a crow.

3. Summary

The poem refers to a winter scene. The poet was sitting beneath a hemlock tree which had snow on its branches. A crow was sitting on a branch. When it moved, a branch shook, and soft powdery snow fell on the poet.

It appears that the poet was feeling gloomy because he regretted something that had happened earlier in the day. So for him, the day had been wasted. The simple act of the crow moving on the branch, leading to a shower of powdery snow on the poet, changed his mood. So, a seemingly insignificant act of the crow shaking the branch had larger consequences. It is ironic that a crow, a creature usually linked with negative aspects of life should bring in positive change.

The contact with nature changed the author's sad mood. The earlier part of his day had been ruined, but with the change of mood, he was able to go through the rest of the day in a better frame of mind. So, in that sense, the rest of the day was saved. This illustrates the healing power that Nature has over human beings.

4. Vocabulary

1. **Mood** – the way you feel at a particular time
My mother was in a good **mood** and readily agreed to buy ice-cream for us.
2. **Rued** – to regret something which often cannot be undone
I **ruded** the fact that I did not study hard, because of which I got low marks in the exam.
3. **Saved** (the day) – to make a bad situation end successfully
It looked like we were going to lose the cricket match, but then Virat Kohli came onto the field and **saved** the day.

5. Questions

Thinking about the Poem

This poem presents a moment that seems simple, but has a larger significance. (Compare this other quotation from Robert Frost: “Always, always a larger significance... A little thing touches a larger thing.”)

1. What is a “dust of snow”? What does the poet say has changed his mood? How has the poet’s mood changed?
2. How does Frost present nature in this poem? The following questions may help you to think of an answer.
 - (i) What are the birds that are usually named in poems? Do you think a crow is often mentioned in poems? What images come to your mind when you think of a crow?
 - (ii) Again, what is “a hemlock tree”? Why doesn’t the poet write about a more ‘beautiful’ tree such as a maple, or an oak, or a pine?
 - (iii) What do the ‘crow’ and ‘hemlock’ represent — joy or sorrow? What does the dust of snow that the crow shakes off a hemlock tree stand for?
3. Have there been times when you felt depressed or hopeless? Have you experienced a similar moment that changed your mood that day?

6. Literary Devices

1. Rhyming Scheme: abab cdcd

The way a crow	a
Shook down on me	b
The dust of snow	a
From a hemlock tree	b
Has given my heart	c
A change of mood	d
And saved some part	c
Of a day I had rued.	d

2. **Alliteration:** The occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected word.

The instances of alliteration are as follows –

- (i) 'Has given my heart' – the 'h' sound is repeated
- (ii) And saved some part – the 's' sound is repeated

3. **Inversion:** When the structure of a sentence is changed by the poet to create rhyme, this poetic license is called inversion. In stanza 1, inversion can be seen.

4. **Assonance:** The prominence of a vowel sound throughout a line is called assonance.

In stanza 1, line 2 –

'Shook down on me' – the 'o' sound is prominent.

5. **Enjambment:** When the same sentence continues to the next line without the use of any punctuation marks, it is called enjambment. It has been used throughout the poem.