

talk
to
me!

LET'S TALK EMPOWERMENT. LET'S TALK ENGLISH

First Flight

Fire and Ice

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.

[\(79\) Fire and Ice - YouTube](#)

2. Background

Robert Frost was a very famous American poet, who was greatly admired for his depictions of the rural life in Massachusetts, United States of America. His poems were written using the same kind of language that the common man used. He wrote about ordinary people in everyday situations. *Fire and Ice* is a short poem, but it is one of his most famous.

3. Summary and explanation

The poem starts with the statement that some people believe that the world will eventually end.

“Some say the world will end...”

Robert Frost clearly also believes that it will end. The rest of the poem is centred on the age old debate about how the world will end. Some people believe it will end in fire. This could happen either because the sun explodes, or there is a huge eruption of a volcano, or a manmade disaster like a nuclear explosion. We have already seen other scenarios like uncontrollable forest fires caused by global warming. On the other hand, there are people

who believe that the world will end in ice. As we all know, the planet has been through many ice ages already.

The poet has experienced, for himself, the ill effects of endless desires which lead to greed and lust.

“From what I’ve tasted of desire”

When men’s desires, greed and lust get out of control, they can start wars. These could unleash a nuclear attack and create fires which destroy the entire planet. Robert Frost agrees with those who feel that ‘fire’, rather than ‘ice’, will destroy the world. It is interesting to note here that ‘fire’ can melt ‘ice’. So clearly it is a more powerful than ice. Similarly, Frost believes that ‘desire’ can be more destructive than ‘hate’.

“I hold with those who favour fire.”

In this first stanza, Robert Frost associates ‘fire’ with desire.

In the second stanza, Robert Frost is willing to look at the situation from a different perspective. He says he has experienced enough hatred to be aware of its destructive power too.

“I think I know enough of hate”

Therefore, if the world had to be destroyed twice, (which we know is not possible), ice could also be powerful enough to cause destruction of the planet.

*“To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.”*

In the second stanza, Robert Frost associates hate with ‘ice’.

Essentially, his message is that both desire and hatred are very destructive forces. He has experienced both these forces, because they are very common. We need to keep both these emotions in control if we want to save our planet.

Please watch this YouTube video to learn more about this poem. Please reduce the playback speed to 0.5 so that you can read the slides carefully.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3c0hD6qvZc>

4. Vocabulary

1. **Desire** – a strong wish
It is her great **desire** to win the marathon.
2. **Favour** – support, approve; to do something for someone to help them
She is so rude that she is out of **favour** with the teachers.
Please can you do me a **favour** and lend me your text book, because I have lost mine.
3. **Perish** – to die or be destroyed
If we do not get rain soon, the crops will **perish**.
4. **Destruction** – the act of destroying something, or the state of being destroyed
The cyclone left widespread **destruction** in its path.
5. **Suffice** – be sufficient, be enough
The notes will **suffice** to explain the meaning of the chapter.

5. Questions

Thinking about the Poem

1. **There are many ideas about how the world will 'end'. Do you think the world will end some day? Have you ever thought what would happen if the sun got so hot that it 'burst', or grew colder and colder?**

2. For Frost, what do 'fire' and 'ice' stand for? Here are some ideas:

greed	avarice	cruelty	lust
conflict	fury	intolerance	rigidity
insensitivity	coldness	indifference	hatred

3. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem? How does it help in bringing out the contrasting ideas in the poem?

6. Literary Devices

Here are some literary devices used in the poem:

1. **Assonance:** This is a repetition of vowel sounds in same line. The repetition is at different places in different words.
Example – The long sound of 'o' in '*I hold with those who favour fire.*'

2. **Alliteration:** Alliteration is the repetition of a consonant sound at the start of two or more closely placed words.

Examples –

- (i) '**S**ome **s**ay' – the 's' sound is repeated
- (ii) '*I hold with those **wh**o*' – the 'h' sound is repeated
- (iii) '*favour **f**ire*' – the 'f' sound is repeated
- (iv) '***w**orld **w**ill*' – the 'w' sound is repeated

3. **Imagery:** Imagery is used to make readers perceive things involving their five senses.

Examples –

"Some say the world will end in fire"

"To say that for destruction ice"

"Is also great"

4. **Anaphora:** This is the repetition of a word or expression at the start of two or more consecutive lines.

Example – “*Some say*” is repeated at the start of lines 1 and 2 in the first stanza.

5. **Personification:** Personification is to give human qualities to inanimate objects. In this poem, ‘*fire*’ and ‘*ice*’ are capable of destruction. Thus, the poet personifies ‘*fire*’ and ‘*ice*’ by giving them the power to destroy the planet.
6. **Enjambment:** It is defined as the thought or clause that does not come to an end at a line break, but moves over to the next line.

For example –

*“From what I’ve tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire”*

7. **Symbolism:** Symbolism is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities, by giving them symbolic meanings different from their literal meanings. Fire is the symbol of desire and ice symbolizes hatred.