

A ROADSIDE STAND

About the poet

Robert Frost (1874-1963) is a highly acclaimed American poet of the twentieth century. Robert Frost wrote about characters, people and landscapes. His poems are concerned with human tragedies and fears, his reaction to the complexities of life and his ultimate acceptance of his burdens. Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening, Birches, Mending walls are a few of his well-known poems. In the poem A Roadside Stand, Frost presents the lives of poor deprived people with pitiless clarity and with the deepest sympathy and humanity.

Before you read

Have you ever stopped at a roadside stand? What have you observed there?

The little old house was out with a little new shed
In front at the edge of the road where the traffic sped,
A roadside stand that too pathetically pled,
It would not be fair to say for a dole of bread,
But for some of the money, the cash, whose flow supports
The flower of cities from sinking and withering faint.
The polished traffic passed with a mind ahead,
Or if ever aside a moment, then out of sorts
At having the landscape marred with the artless paint
Of signs that with N turned wrong and S turned wrong
Offered for sale wild berries in wooden quarts,
Or crook-necked golden squash with silver warts,
Or beauty rest in a beautiful mountain scene,
You have the money, but if you want to be mean,
Why keep your money (this crossly) and go along.
The hurt to the scenery wouldn't be my complain

So much as the trusting sorrow of what is unsaid:
Here far from the city we make our roadside stand
And ask for some city money to feel in hand
To try if it will not make our being expand,
And give us the life of the moving-pictures' promise
That the party in power is said to be keeping from us.
It is in the news that all these pitiful kin
Are to be bought out and mercifully gathered in
To live in villages, next to the theatre and the store,
Where they won't have to think for themselves anymore,
While greedy good-doers, beneficent beasts of prey,
Swarm over their lives enforcing benefits
That are calculated to soothe them out of their wits,
And by teaching them how to sleep they sleep all day,
Destroy their sleeping at night the ancient way.
Sometimes I feel myself I can hardly bear
The thought of so much childish longing in vain,
The sadness that lurks near the open window there,
That waits all day in almost open prayer
For the squeal of brakes, the sound of a stopping car,
Of all the thousand selfish cars that pass,
Just one to inquire what a farmer's prices are.
And one did stop, but only to plow up grass
In using the yard to back and turn around;
And another to ask the way to where it was bound;
And another to ask could they sell it a gallon of gas

They couldn't (this crossly); they had none, didn't it see?

No, in country money, the country scale of gain,

The requisite lift of spirit has never been found,

Or so the voice of the country seems to complain,

I can't help owning the great relief it would be

To put these people at one stroke out of their pain.

And then next day as I come back into the sane,

I wonder how I should like you to come to me

And offer to put me gently out of my pain.

quarts : bottles or containers

squash : a kind of vegetable (gourd)

LISTEN TO THE POEM

Click on the link below to hear the poem being read. Pay attention to the pronunciation of various words.

[A Roadside Stand](#)

RURAL ROADSIDE STAND AND PASSING TRAFFIC



VOCABULARY

1. **Pathetically** : an action done in a way that it either arouses pity or sympathy.
The injured dog cried **pathetically** .
2. **Pled** : to ask somebody for something in a very strong and serious way.
She **pled** with him to stay.
3. **Dole of bread** : a small portion of bread given as a charity to the needy.
During the harsh winter, the local monastery provided a daily **dole of bread** to the needy villagers.
4. **Withering** : to lose freshness, vigor or vitality.
The summer drought left the crops **withering** in the fields.
5. **Marred** : to harm or damage something good.
The celebrations were **marred** by arguments and fights.

6. **Sorrow** : a feeling of great sadness because something bad has happened.
She expressed deep **sorrow** at the sudden passing of her friend.
7. **Expand** : to become or make something bigger.
Metals **expand** when they are heated.
8. **Moving pictures** : is an informal term for a movie, film or motion picture.
When cinema first emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was referred to as **moving pictures** .
9. **Pitiful** : causing you to feel pity or sadness.
The **pitiful** groans of the wounded soldiers could be heard in the hospital.
10. **Kin** : generally refers to a person's family and relatives.
She invited all her **kin** to the wedding.
11. **Mercifully** : to act in a compassionate, kind or forgiving way.
The vet **mercifully** put the ill dog out of its suffering.
12. **Beneficent** : doing good, performing acts of kindness.
His **beneficent** acts during the crisis earned him a national award.
13. **Swarm** : a large number of people together.
People **swarm** to the malls during the weekends.
14. **Enforcing** : to make people obey a law or rule or do something that they do not want to do.
The police are **enforcing** the new speed limit on the highway.
15. **Soothe** : to calm, comfort or relieve.
The doctor gave me some skin cream to **soothe** the irritation.
16. **Lurks** : to wait somewhere secretly especially in order to do something bad or illegal.
A sense of danger **lurks** around every corner in a war- torn city.
17. **Squeal of brakes** : a high pitched, piercing sound made by a vehicle's brakes.
The car came to a halt with a loud **squeal of brakes** .
18. **Plow up grass** : to dig into or break the surface of a grassy area.
The farmer decided to **plow up the grass** in his yard to plant vegetables.
19. **Requisite** : necessary for a particular purpose.
She lacks the **requisite** experience for the job.
20. **Sane** : having a healthy mind, not mentally ill.
No **sane** person would do anything like that.

SUMMARY

The poem highlighted the harsh reality faced by poor rural people who set up a small roadside stand to sell their farm produce to passing city travelers. These villagers hoped to earn some extra money and improve their difficult lives.

However, the city people who drove by rarely stopped to buy anything. If they did stop, it was usually to complain, ask for directions, or criticize the stand for spoiling the scenic beauty. This showed their lack of empathy and concern for the struggles of the rural poor.

Frost criticised the unequal distribution of wealth and the indifference of urban society. He also pointed out how false promises are often made to uplift rural communities, but in reality, little is done to help them. So they continue to struggle.

The poet felt deep sympathy for the villagers and had even expressed an insane thought—that they might be relieved if they could be put out of their pain in one quick stroke (in other words, be killed). This may be better than having them live in a continuous state of disappointment. However, the next day, perhaps when he was calmer, he wondered how he would feel if someone were to come to him and offer to relieve him gently out of his pain.

Core message:

The poem brings out social inequality and highlights the neglect and exploitation of rural communities by the urban rich, urging readers to develop compassion and awareness for the poor.

THINK ABOUT IT

Q.1. The city folk who drove through the countryside hardly paid any heed to the roadside stand or to the people who ran it. If at all they did, it was to complain. Which lines bring this out? What was their complaint about?

Answer. "The polished traffic passed with a mind ahead, Or if ever aside a moment, then out of sorts at having the landscape marred with the artless paint of signs that with N turned wrong and S turned wrong.' According to the city folk, these stalls with inartistic signboards spoiled the scenic beauty of the landscape.

Q.2. What was the plea of the folk who had put up the roadside stand?

Answer. The rural folks pleaded pathetically for some customers to stop by and buy some of their goods. City folks used to pass by on this road and hence the rural folk set up roadside stands to attract their attention and sell their goods.

Q.3. The government and other social service agencies appear to help the poor rural people, but actually do them no good. Pick out the words and phrases that the poet uses to show their double standards.

Answer. The poet criticised the double standards of the government and other social service agencies who promised to improve the standard of living of the poor farmers and showed them the rosy side of life. Yet, when the time came to deliver their promise, they either forgot them or fulfilled them keeping in view their own benefits. The poet called them "greedy good-doers" and "beneficent beasts of prey", who "swarm over their lives". The poet said that these greedy people made calculated and well thought-out shrewd moves, to which the innocent, unaware farmers fell prey. These humble and simple farmers are robbed of their peace of mind by these clever people. The poet says,

".....enforcing benefits That are calculated to soothe them out of their wits, And by teaching them how to sleep they sleep all day, destroy their sleeping at night the ancient way.

Q.4. What is the 'childish longing' that the poet refers to? Why is it 'vain'?

Answer. The poet thought that the persons who were running the roadside stand, suffered from a childish longing. They were always waiting to hear the squeal of brakes, which is the sound of a car stopping. They kept their windows open to attract them. They were always hoping for customers. But all their efforts to attract customers were in vain. They were sad when no one bought their produce like berries and squash.

Q.5. Which lines tell us about the insufferable pain that the poet feels at the thought of the plight of the rural poor?

Answer. Filled with empathy, the poet is unable to bear the plight of the unassuming and innocent rural people.

The lines below show his insufferable pain:

"Sometimes I feel myself I can hardly bear The thought of so much childish longing in vain,
The sadness that lurks near the open window there, that waits all day in almost open prayer"

Read the extract carefully:

"The little old house was out with a little new shed
In front at the edge of the road where the traffic sped..."

Q1. What is the purpose of building the "little new shed"?

- A. Storage of crops
- B. Selling goods to passersby
- C. Resting place
- D. Decoration

Q2. What does “traffic sped” indicate?

- A. Calm rural life
 - B. Busy and fast-moving city vehicles
 - C. Empty roads
 - D. Slow movement
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Q3. Which theme is highlighted here?

- A. Beauty of nature
- B. Rural struggle for survival
- C. Childhood memories
- D. War and conflict

Q4. The tone of the extract is:

- A. Humorous
- B. Hopeful yet desperate
- C. Angry
- D. Carefree

Read the extract:

“The polished traffic passed with a mind ahead,
Or if ever aside a moment, then out of sorts...”

Q5. “Polished traffic” refers to:

- A. Clean roads
- B. Rich, urban people in cars
- C. Government vehicles
- D. Tourists only

Q6. Why do cars stop “out of sorts”?

- A. To shop happily
- B. To rest peacefully
- C. Due to irritation and complaints
- D. To admire scenery

Q7. What does this reveal about city people?

- A. They are indifferent and impatient
- B. They are kind
- C. They are generous
- D. They are helpful

Q8. Identify the poetic device in “mind ahead”:

- A. Simile
- B. Metaphor
- C. Personification
- D. Hyperbole

Read the extract:

“Of all the thousand selfish cars
That pass, just one to inquire...”

Q9. What is implied by “selfish cars”?

- A. Cars are expensive
- B. Drivers are self-centered
- C. Roads are narrow
- D. Cars are old

Q10. Why does the poet use “thousand”?

- A. Exact number
- B. To show wealth
- C. To count vehicles
- D. Exaggeration to show large numbers

Q11. What emotion is conveyed here?

- A. Joy
- B. Frustration and disappointment
- C. Excitement
- D. Pride

Q12. What is the central idea of this extract?

- A. Neglect of rural people
- B. Importance of travel
- C. Development of cities
- D. Beauty of highways

Read the extract:

“Sometimes I feel myself I can hardly bear
The thought of so much childish longing in vain...”

Q13. “Childish longing” refers to:

- A. Children’s wishes
- B. Innocent hope of villagers for customers
- C. Desire for toys
- D. School dreams

Q14. What does “in vain” suggest?

- A. Failure and disappointment
- B. Success
- C. Happiness
- D. Growth

Q15. What is the poet’s feeling here?

- A. Anger
- B. Sympathy and pain
- C. Humour
- D. Fear

Q16. Which theme is highlighted?

- A. Adventure
- B. Social injustice and inequality
- C. War
- D. Nature

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

Q.1. Why do the people who run the roadside stand wait for the squeal of brakes so eagerly?

Q.2. Explain: “soothe them out of their wits” with reference to the poem ‘The Roadside Stand’.

Q.3. Why does Robert Frost sympathise with the rural poor?

LITERARY DEVICES

1. Imagery

Frost creates vivid pictures of the rural setting and the roadside stand:

- *“pathetic sight of the little old house”*
This helps readers visualize poverty and neglect.
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2. Alliteration

Repetition of consonant sounds:

- “sound of a stopping car”
 - Adds musical quality and emphasis.
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3. Metaphor

Indirect comparison:

- The **road** represents progress and modern life passing by rural communities without helping them.
 - The **roadside stand** symbolizes the villagers' hope for survival.
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4. Irony

There is a contrast between expectation and reality:

- Villagers expect city people to help, but they are ignored or criticized instead.
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5. Personification

Giving human traits to non-human things:

- “*selfish cars*” — cars are described as if they intentionally ignore the stand.
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6. Symbolism

Objects carry deeper meanings:

- **Roadside stand** → rural struggle and hope
 - **City money** → economic power and inequality
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