

'THE ROAD NOT TAKEN'

- Four stanzas, each of five lines
- Regular abaab rhyme scheme
- Lexis simple and accessible
- American spelling of “traveler” and “traveled”
- Simplicity sometimes sounds like a moral tale or parable
- Inverted syntax contributes to this effect – “long I stood”
- Lexis like “diverged”, “fair” and “hence” add to formality and slightly archaic feel
- Formal though simple tone: no contractions, slang or colloquialisms
- Past tense throughout until last stanza
- Future tense in final stanza, correctness of prescriptive grammar again influencing formal tone – “I shall be telling this”
- First person speaker
- Story-telling mood e.g. number of lines beginning with “and”
- Nothing figurative – no similes or metaphors, except, perhaps, the whole poem
- Paths, roads, forks = ancient metaphor for life’s crises and decisions
- Ambiguity of whole poem – difficult to identify attitudes and values
- Frost described it as a “very tricky” poem
- Ambiguity of title: which is the “road not taken”?
- Is “the road not taken” “the road less traveled”? = not taken by most people?
- Or “the road not taken” “the first” one, the one that the speaker did not take?
- Careful reading needed to detect deliberate inconsistency and irony
- Has been called the most misunderstood poem in American literature!

- Certainly about the nature of choice, of decision, and of regret, perhaps
- Choice or fate?
- Freedom to choose, but do not know what we are choosing, its consequences, or what the other choice would have brought
- Surveying the choices, cannot see very far, do not know outcome –
 “And looked down one as far as I could
 To where it bent in the undergrowth”
- Superficial reading suggests it is about individualism, encouraging the taking of the “road less traveled”, choosing to go one’s own way, not following the pack, being unconventional
- But makes clear three times that the two roads were indistinguishable, that one was not “less traveled” than the other!
 “just as fair”; “worn ... about the same”; “equally ... no step had trodden”
- But, in old age, he will claim that he did it his way and took “the one less traveled by”
- He will brag fraudulently of his youthful sense of adventure, swaggering of being his own man, a nonconformist, a free thinker
- He will hold up his own life as an example
- Last line sententious and moralising – “And that made all the difference”
- But not true! Ironic – he did not choose “the road less traveled”: they were both the same. He will merely claim that he did!