

## AMERICAN ROMANTICISM IN ROBERT FROST'S POEMS

by  
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**WebQuest Description:** This webquest will give students an information about the American Romanticism and about Robert Frost's poems within the cultural context. It also will help to find the distinctive features of his poems.

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**Curriculum:** English / Language Arts

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### Introduction

Robert Frost holds a unique and almost isolated position in American letters. "Though his career fully spans the modern period and though it is impossible to speak of him as anything other than a modern poet," writes James M. Cox, "it is difficult to place him in the main tradition of modern poetry." In a sense, Frost stands at the crossroads of nineteenth-century American poetry and modernism, for in his verse may be found the culmination of many nineteenth-century tendencies and traditions as well as parallels to the works of his twentieth-century contemporaries. Taking his symbols from the public domain, Frost developed, as many critics note, an original, modern idiom and a sense of directness and economy that reflect the imagism of Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell. On the other hand, as Leonard Unger and William Van O'Connor point out in *Poems for Study*, "Frost's poetry, unlike that of such contemporaries as Eliot, Stevens, and the later Yeats, shows no marked departure from the poetic practices of the nineteenth century." Although he avoids traditional verse forms and only uses rhyme erratically, Frost is not an innovator and his technique is never experimental. This WebQuest will give you an opportunity to see in details due to what features and ideas R. Frost is thought to be a unique poet of the common people of 20th century.

### Tasks

From this WebQuest you will know the main topics of the Frost's poetry, the main issues and problems he tried to lighten. His poetry is not so easy to understand although sometimes it looks like even childish. There were a lot of events in his life that had influenced his view and his works. All this information will help you to do the following tasks: 1. Choose one poem (any one you like) and make its full literary analysis. (For those who have accidentally forgotten the algorithm of literary analysis of the poetry I attached the following link so that you can refresh your knowledge): [http://library.thinkquest.org/23846/writing\\_guide/poetry.html](http://library.thinkquest.org/23846/writing_guide/poetry.html) 2. Choose one poem and make a literary translation (or word-for-word translation if you are not sure about your poetical skills). 3. Write a short essay about the main sources of his inspiration and who his private life and all the events influenced his poetry.

### Process

Let's start first of all from the key factors of R. Frost's biography. Watch the 1st video. Frost's theory of poetic composition ties him to both centuries. Like the nineteenth-century Romantics, he maintained that a poem is "never a put-up job.... It begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a loneliness. It is never a thought to begin with. It is at its best when it is a tantalizing vagueness." Yet, "working out his own version of the 'impersonal' view of art," as Hyatt H. Waggoner observed, Frost also upheld T. S. Eliot's idea that the man who suffers and the artist who creates are totally separate. In a 1932 letter to Sydney Cox, Frost explained his conception of poetry: "The objective idea is all I ever cared about. Most of my ideas occur in verse.... To be too subjective with what an artist has managed to make objective is to come on him presumptuously and render ungraceful what he in pain of his life had faith he had made graceful." To accomplish such objectivity and grace, Frost took up nineteenth-century tools and made them new. Lawrence Thompson has explained that, according to Frost, "the self-imposed restrictions of meter in form and of coherence in content" work to a poet's advantage; they liberate him from the experimentalist's burden—the perpetual search for new forms and alternative structures. Thus Frost, as he himself put it in "The Constant Symbol," wrote his verse regular; he never completely abandoned conventional metrical forms for free verse, as so many of his contemporaries were doing. At the same time, his adherence to meter, line length, and rhyme scheme was not an arbitrary choice. He maintained that "the freshness of a poem belongs absolutely to its not having been thought out and then set to verse as the verse in turn might be set to music." He believed, rather, that the poem's particular mood dictated or determined the poet's "first commitment to metre and length of line." Critics frequently point out that Frost complicated his problem and enriched his style by setting traditional meters against the natural rhythms of speech. Drawing his language primarily from the vernacular, he avoided artificial poetic diction by employing the accent of a soft-spoken New

Englander. In *The Function of Criticism*, Yvor Winters faulted Frost for his "endeavor to make his style approximate as closely as possible the style of conversation." But what Frost achieved in his poetry was much more complex than a mere imitation of the New England farmer idiom. He wanted to restore to literature the "sentence sounds that underlie the words," the "vocal gesture" that enhances meaning. That is, he felt the poet's ear must be sensitive to the voice in order to capture with the written word the significance of sound in the spoken word. "The Death of the Hired Man," for instance, consists almost entirely of dialogue between Mary and Warren, her farmer-husband, but critics have observed that in this poem Frost takes the prosaic patterns of their speech and makes them lyrical. To Ezra Pound "The Death of the Hired Man" represented Frost at his best—when he "dared to write ... in the natural speech of New England; in natural spoken speech, which is very different from the 'natural' speech of the newspapers, and of many professors." Frost's use of New England dialect is only one aspect of his often discussed regionalism. Within New England, his particular focus was on New Hampshire, which he called "one of the two best states in the Union," the other being Vermont. In an essay entitled "Robert Frost and New England: A Reevaluation," W. G. O'Donnell noted how from the start, in *A Boy's Will*, "Frost had already decided to give his writing a local habitation and a New England name, to root his art in the soil that he had worked with his own hands." Reviewing *North of Boston* in the *New Republic*, Amy Lowell wrote, "Not only is his work New England in subject, it is so in technique.... Mr. Frost has reproduced both people and scenery with a vividness which is extraordinary." Many other critics have lauded Frost's ability to realistically evoke the New England landscape; they point out that one can visualize an orchard in "After Apple-Picking" or imagine spring in a farmyard in "Two Tramps in Mud Time." In this "ability to portray the local truth in nature," O'Donnell claims, Frost has no peer. The same ability prompted Pound to declare, "I know more of farm life than I did before I had read his poems. That means I know more of 'Life.'" Frost's regionalism, critics remark, is in his realism, not in politics; he creates no picture of regional unity or sense of community. In *The Continuity of American Poetry*, Roy Harvey Pearce describes Frost's protagonists as individuals who are constantly forced to confront their individualism as such and to reject the modern world in order to retain their identity. Frost's use of nature is not only similar but closely tied to this regionalism. He stays as clear of religion and mysticism as he does of politics. What he finds in nature is sensuous pleasure; he is also sensitive to the earth's fertility and to man's relationship to the soil. To critic M. L. Rosenthal, Frost's pastoral quality, his "lyrical and realistic repossession of the rural and 'natural,'" is the staple of his reputation. Yet, just as Frost is aware of the distances between one man and another, so he is also always aware of the distinction, the ultimate separateness, of nature and man. Marion Montgomery has explained, "His attitude toward nature is one of armed and amicable truce and mutual respect interspersed with crossings of the boundaries" between individual man and natural forces. Below the surface of Frost's poems are dreadful implications, what Rosenthal calls his "shocked sense of the helpless cruelty of things." This natural cruelty is at work in "Design" and in "Once by the Pacific." The ominous tone of these two poems prompted Rosenthal's further comment: "At his most powerful Frost is as staggered by 'the horror' as Eliot and approaches the hysterical edge of sensibility in a comparable way.... His is still the modern mind in search of its own meaning." The austere and tragic view of life that emerges in so many of Frost's poems is modulated by his metaphysical use of detail. As Frost portrays him, man might be alone in an ultimately indifferent universe, but he may nevertheless look to the natural world for metaphors of his own condition. Thus, in his search for meaning in the modern world, Frost focuses on those moments when the seen and the unseen, the tangible and the spiritual intersect. John T. Napier calls this Frost's ability "to find the ordinary a matrix for the extraordinary." In this respect, he is often compared with Emily Dickinson and Ralph Waldo Emerson, in whose poetry, too, a simple fact, object, person, or event will be transfigured and take on greater mystery or significance. The poem "Birches" is an example: it contains the image of slender trees bent to the ground- temporarily by a boy's swinging on them or permanently by an ice-storm. But as the poem unfolds, it becomes clear that the speaker is concerned not only with child's play and natural phenomena, but also with the point at which physical and spiritual reality merge. Such symbolic import of mundane facts informs many of Frost's poems, and in "Education by Poetry" he explained: "Poetry begins in trivial metaphors, pretty metaphors, 'grace' metaphors, and goes on to the profoundest thinking that we have. Poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another.... Unless you are at home in the metaphor, unless you have had your proper poetical education in the metaphor, you are not safe anywhere." You've just read about R. Frost's main features as a poet of Romanticism for further information you can follow the link <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/robert-frost> where you can also read about his formation and first steps as a poet. Following this link you can see his main collections and poems (it can help you with accomplishing the tasks) <http://www.ketzle.com/frost/>

## Evaluation

Each student will be evaluated according to the following rubric:

Category and Score	Beginning	Developing	Very Good	Exemplary	Score
Literary analysis of the poem	The poem is analyzed. But more than half of the items from the algorithm are missed. Personal opinion isn't given.	The poem is analyzed. But some of the items from the algorithm are missed. The built of the analysis isn't logical.	The poem is analyzed fully. All the items from the algorithm are mentioned. But the student didn't dive his/her own opinion concerning the poem in a whole.	The poem is analyzed fully. All the items from the algorithm are mentioned. The personal opinion is given as well.	10
Poem translation		Word for word translation is made.		Literary translation is made.	10
Essay	The structure of the essay is disordered, the content isn't logically built.	The structure of the essay is disordered, but the we can distinguish the main ideas and points.	The essay is built according to all the rules, structure is kept. The ideas may be mixed.	The essay is built according to all the rules, structure is kept and the content is logically built so that the ideas are clear.	10
				Total Score	

## Conclusion

Congratulations! You have done a great job. Now you can confidently say that you had been a poet, a literary critic and a researcher while doing all the tasks and making the acquaintance of American Romanticism and Robert Frost particularly!

## Teacher Page

This webquest will give students an information about the American Romanticism and about Robert Frost's poems within the cultural context. It also will help to find the distinctive features of his poems.&nbsp;

## Reviews

## Footer

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