

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Mending Wall

By Robert Frost

1919

*Robert Frost (1874-1963) was one of the most popular and critically respected American poets in recent history. His poems often employ rural scenes from the New England countryside. In "Mending Wall," published in 1919, a speaker contemplates the time each year in which he and his neighbor come together to repair the wall dividing their land. As you read, take notes on Frost's use of form, and the speaker's point of view throughout the poem.*

- [1] Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;<sup>1</sup>  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.<sup>2</sup>
- [5] The work of hunters is another thing:  
I have come after them and made repair  
Where they have left not one stone on a  
stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
- [10] No one has seen them made or heard them  
made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them  
there.  
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.
- [15] We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
- [20] We wear our fingers rough with handling them.  
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:



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1. A possible reference to the way that water expands when frozen, and contracts when melting, sometimes creating fissures in stone.
2. **Abreast** (*adverb*) side by side; beside

There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
[25] My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'  
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
[30] 'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like<sup>3</sup> to give offense.  
[35] Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself. I see him there  
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
[40] In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
[45] He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

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3. In this context, "like" means "likely."

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Explain how the speaker's point of view shifts throughout the poem. Cite evidence from the poem in your response.

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2. PART A: Which TWO of the following best identify the central themes of this poem?

- A. Human connection
- B. The importance of boundaries
- C. Violence and war
- D. Familial love
- E. Questioning the status quo
- F. The indifference of nature

3. PART B: Which TWO phrases from the text best support the answers to Part A?

- A. "And makes gaps even two can pass abreast." (Line 4)
- B. "There where it is we do not need the wall: / He is all pine and I am apple orchard." (Lines 23-24)
- C. "Good fences make good neighbors." (Line 27)
- D. "Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder / If I could put a notion in his head" (Lines 28-29)
- E. "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know / What I was walling in or walling out, / And to whom I was like to give offense." (Lines 32-34)
- F. "He moves in darkness as it seems to me, / Not of woods only and the shade of trees." (Lines 41-42)

4. PART A: What does the word "spell" most closely mean as it is used in line 18?
- A. Command
  - B. Hex
  - C. Moment
  - D. Fascination
5. PART B: Which phrase from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "To each the boulders that have fallen to each" (Line 16)
  - B. "And some are loaves and some so nearly balls" (Line 17)
  - C. "to make them balance" (Line 18)
  - D. "'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'" (Line 19)
6. How does the poem's form relate to its meaning? Cite evidence from the poem in your response.

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## Discussion Questions

**Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.**

1. Do you think the speaker's attitude toward the wall changes throughout the poem, or does he question its necessity from the beginning? Why?
2. Why does the neighbor believe that "Good fences make good neighbors?" Do you agree with him?
3. Have you ever questioned anything you were raised to believe? Why?
4. The speaker says that his neighbor "will not go behind his father's saying" that "Good fences make good neighbors." In the context of this poem, what are the effects of being a follower? In your opinion, is it a good thing to follow the crowd, or to stick to the status quo? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
5. Despite the speaker's insistence toward the end of the poem that they do not need a fence, the neighbor refuses to consider change. In the context of this poem, why do people resist change? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.