

SUMMARY

This eight-line poem uses the fate of a leaf as a metaphor for the transience and flawed nature of life.

About the Art George Bellows (1882–1925) was a famous American painter known mostly for urban scenes, paintings of boxing matches, and New England seascapes. This rural landscape, with its long shadows and dark colors, possesses a bleak beauty that matches Frost’s poem.

LITERARY ANALYSIS

FROST’S STYLE

Possible answer: The mood is one of sadness, wistfulness, or grief at the impermanence of things. Diction and imagery include the terse, repetitious vocabulary, the simple rhymes, the end-stopped lines which create a blunt, sad tone, and the image of Eden sinking to grief (line 6) and dawn going “down to day” (line 7).

ANSWERS

1. The speaker knows what the night is like because he has taken long walks in it often.
2. He sees the rain, the city streets and what is beyond them, the watchman, and the clock against the sky; he hears the sound of feet and the cry from another street.
3. Both Eden and the leaf experience a brief moment of perfection before succumbing to their fate.

Nothing Gold Can Stay

Robert Frost

Nature’s first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf’s a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden¹ sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay. ❶

1. Eden: the biblical Garden of Eden, from which Adam and Eve were expelled for disobeying God.

Literary Analysis

1. **Clarify** What does the speaker of the first poem mean when he says he’s been “acquainted with the night”?
2. **Summarize** What does the speaker of “Acquainted with the Night” see and hear on his walk?
3. **Interpret Analogies** In “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” how is the fate of a leaf similar to that of the Garden of Eden?



Haystacks and Barn (1909), George Wesley Bellows. Oil on canvas, 56.5 cm × 71.4 cm. © Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas/Bridgeman Art Library.

FROST’S STYLE

What is the mood of this poem? Identify the diction or imagery that most strongly establishes this mood for you.

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

FOR LESS-PROFICIENT READERS

Comprehension Support Have students work in Jigsaw groups to paraphrase the poem line by line. Give each group one line, if possible. If you have fewer groups, give each two lines. Then have groups reconvene to paraphrase the entire poem.

 **BEST PRACTICES TOOLKIT**
Jigsaw Reading p. A1

FOR ADVANCED LEARNERS/AP

Analyze Symbolism Ask students to investigate and report back on the symbolic references in the poem. These include:

- the color green (line 1)
- the color gold (line 1)
- the biblical narrative of Eden (line 6)

Examples: Green is a symbol for youthful life. Gold can be a symbol of wealth or of excellence as in the Greek myth of the Golden Age. The

biblical narrative of Eden is a symbol of humanity’s fall from perfection. Invite students to comment on the moods they associate with each symbol and to discuss how each serves Frost’s stylistic goals.