

# Song of the Open Road

Poetry by WALT WHITMAN

# The Road Not Taken

Poetry by ROBERT FROST

### Connect to Your Life

**Outward Bound** The Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu wrote that “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” But when the journey is your own life, how do you decide what step to take? Think about some decisions you’ve made in the past or may face in the future—such as choosing the right job or deciding on a college. Then create a chart that shows your decision-making process and share it with a classmate. An example is shown. Your chart can be different, as long as it is clear to others how you could reach a decision.

### Decision: Should I Learn to Ski?

#### Reasons for Yes

I might really enjoy it.  
I’ll definitely learn something new.  
There’s a club I could join, so I’ll meet people.

#### Reasons for No

It might be difficult or expensive.  
I might not like it (but then I could quit, so not a good reason).

Choice: Yes

## Build Background

**Journeys** Think of all the ways we use the word *road*. For example, there are the phrases “the road to success,” “on the road,” and “taking the high road.” Singer Bob Dylan asked, “How many roads must a man walk down, before you call him a man?” Clearly,

the image of a road has become a kind of **metaphor**, as in “the road of life.” Often a destination is implied, such as a dream, a career, or an ideal. Sometimes



what attracts us is not the goal at the end; it’s the journey itself. In the following poems, Whitman speaks of the “open road”—a very American idea—and Frost considers the problem of choosing one road over another.

## Focus Your Reading

### LITERARY ANALYSIS

### RHYME SCHEME/FREE VERSE

Not all poetry rhymes, but when it does, there is usually a **rhyme scheme**, a pattern or sequence of rhyme sounds at the ends of lines.

Poetry that has no regular pattern of rhyme or **rhythm** is called **free verse**. The lines in free verse often flow more naturally than do rhymed, **metrical** lines. They achieve a rhythm more like that of everyday speech. As you read the following poems, notice where you find regular rhyme or rhythm and where you do not. In the case of free verse, what other sound devices do you think the poet uses?

### ACTIVE READING

### PARAPHRASING

**Paraphrasing** is simply putting things in your own words. It is often useful in helping you better understand a poem. Paraphrasing often uses simpler forms or words, but it is not necessarily shorter, since it is not a summary but a reshaping of information. To be able to paraphrase, you need to

- find the **main idea** of what a writer is saying
- notice **details** that indicate what the writer feels or sees
- if possible, think of simpler or more familiar ways of saying what the writer has written



### READER'S NOTEBOOK

As you read these poems, be thinking of ways you might paraphrase them. This is difficult with poetry; a paraphrase will often lack the power and subtlety of the original. But look for main ideas that you could state in your own words and jot them down.



# SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD

W A L T   W H I T M A N

Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,  
Healthy, free, the world before me,  
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.  
Henceforth I ask not good fortune, I myself am good fortune,  
5 Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more,  
    need nothing,  
Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,  
Strong and content I travel the open road.

**4 henceforth:** from this time forward.

**6 indoor complaints:** illnesses caused by a lack of fresh air and outdoor exercise;

**querulous** (kwě'r'ə-ləs): complaining; grumbling.

## Thinking Through the Literature

- 1. Comprehension Check** What does Whitman's road look like?
- Based on the poem, what kind of person do you think the **speaker** is?
- What kind of change do you think the speaker has decided to make in his or her life?

THINK  
ABOUT

- the apparent state of mind of the speaker
- what the speaker might have been doing previously, based on the poem



# THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

R O B E R T F R O S T

Two roads diverged<sup>1</sup> in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
5 To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
10 Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden<sup>2</sup> black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
15 I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
20 And that has made all the difference.

1. **diverged** (dĭ-vŭrjd'): branched out; went in different directions.

2. **trodden** (trŏd'n): walked or trampled.