Robert Frost was one of America's most esteemed poets. His poetry often documented the rural life in America, particularly New England.

The poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is considered a hallmark of simplicity. With only 16 lines, Frost used to describe it as "a short poem with a long name." It is said that Frost wrote this poem in 1922 in a moment of inspiration.

The poem was first published on March 7, 1923, in the magazine the New Republic.

Frost's poetry collection "New Hampshire," which went on to win a Pulitzer Prize, also featured this poem.

**Deeper Meaning In "Stopping By Woods ..."**

The narrator of the poem talks about how he stops by the forest one day on his way back to his village. The poem goes on to describe the beauty of the forest, covered in a sheet of snow. But
there's a lot more going on than just a man riding home in the winter.

Some interpretations of this poem suggest that the horse is actually the narrator, or at least, is in the same mindset as the narrator, echoing his thoughts.

The central theme of the poem is the journey of life and the distractions that come along the way. In other words, there is so little time, and so much to do.

**The Santa Claus Interpretation**

Another interpretation is that the poem is describing Santa Claus, who is passing through the woods. The time period described here is the winter solstice when presumably Santa Claus is making his way to the village.

Could the horse represent the reindeer? It seems possible that the narrator could be Santa Claus when he reflects on "promises to keep" and "miles to go before I sleep."

**The Staying Power Of The Phrase "Miles To Go Before I Sleep"**

This line is the most famous in the poem, with countless academics arguing over why it's repeated twice.

Its underlying meaning is the unfinished business that we have while we are still alive. This line has often been used in literary and political circles.

When Robert Kennedy made a tribute speech after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, he said:

"He (John Kennedy) often quoted from Robert Frost - and said it applied to himself - but we could apply it to the Democratic Party and to all of us as individuals: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep.""

The first prime minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, kept a copy of Frost's book close to him till his last years. He hand-wrote the last stanza of the poem on a pad that lay on his desk: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep/But I have promises to keep/And miles to go before I sleep/And miles to go before I sleep."

When Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau died, on October 3, 2000, his son Justin wrote in his eulogy:

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep. He has kept his promises and earned his sleep."

**Does The Poem Reflect Frost's Suicidal Tendencies?**

On a darker note, there is some indication that the poem is a statement about Frost's mental state.
He faced many personal tragedies during his lifetime and struggled in poverty for more than 20 years. His younger sister Jeanie and his daughter were both hospitalized for mental illness, and both Frost and his mother suffered from depression.

Many critics suggested that "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" was a death wish, a contemplative poem that describes Frost's mental state. The symbolism of snow as cold and the forest being dark and deep adds foreboding.

However, other critics just read the poem as a ride through the woods. It's possible Frost was being optimistic by ending the poem with "But I have promises to keep." This suggests the narrator wants to go back to his family to fulfill his duties.
Quiz

1. Read the first sentence of the article.

Robert Frost was one of America's most esteemed poets.

Which other sentence from the introduction BEST emphasizes what the author means by "esteemed"?

(A) The poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is considered a hallmark of simplicity.
(B) It is said that Frost wrote this poem in 1922 in a moment of inspiration.
(C) The poem was first published on March 7, 1923, in the magazine the New Republic.
(D) Frost's poetry collection "New Hampshire," which went on to win a Pulitzer Prize, also featured this poem.

2. Read the paragraph from the section "Does The Poem Reflect Frost's Suicidal Tendencies?"

Many critics suggested that "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" was a death wish, a contemplative poem that describes Frost's mental state. The symbolism of snow as cold and the forest being dark and deep adds foreboding.

How do the words "contemplative" and "foreboding" convey the tone of this interpretation?

(A) by emphasizing a brooding and ominous feeling
(B) by suggesting a simple and straightforward prediction
(C) by emphasizing a thoughtful and curious personality
(D) by suggesting a depressing and violent history

3. Which idea does the author develop LEAST in this article about "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"?

(A) the visual imagery of the woods and the impact of it in the final line
(B) the support for the interpretation that the poem is about Santa Claus
(C) the role and meaning of the poem often applied in political circles
(D) the possibility that tragedies in Frost's life influenced the poem

4. How does the author describe different interpretations of the poem over the course of the article?

(A) The author presents all of the various interpretations of the poem as equally valid and accepted by literary critics.
(B) The author begins by presenting Frost's own interpretation of the poem and then compares it with others.
(C) The author presents different interpretations of the poem but emphasizes its message about life's duties.
(D) The author begins by presenting early interpretations of the poem and then contrasts them with more modern ones.