

The Road not Taken

CHOICES AND DECISIONS

What kind of choices do you have to make? Write down four choices that you have made in the last week (example: *go to class or stay at home*).

Now put the four choices in order from most important to least important. Compare with a partner. Did you have the same choices?

BEFORE YOU READ

You are going to read a famous American poem about a choice that somebody had to make. It is called "The Road Not Taken". Here are some words from the poem. Check that you understand what they mean. What do you think the poem will be about?

WOOD UNDERGROWTH TRODDEN GRASSY WORN

Read the poem to check.

The Road not Taken

Robert Frost (1874-1963)

*Two roads diverged 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
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
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
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,
And that has made all the difference.*

COMPREHENSION

Read the poem and answer the questions.

- a) What are the differences between the two roads?
- b) Is the author happy with his choice?
- c) Do you think it was a difficult decision?
- d) What does the poem mean?

LANGUAGE WORK

- a) What words does the author use to avoid repeating "the road" (for example "it"?)
- b) The author has made several sentences much shorter and has also changed the word order in some cases. Can you rewrite the following in Standard English?
e.g. *The Road Not Taken* = *The Road Which Wasn't Taken*

And sorry I could not take both

And be one traveler, long I stood

Then took the other, as just as fair and having perhaps the better claim

Yet knowing how way leads on to way I doubted if I should ever come back.

- c) Look at this line from the poem. *Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by...* Why does the author repeat the word "I" twice? What effect does it have on the poem?

DISCUSSION – Discuss these questions in partners or small groups.

- Do you like the poem?
- Many people in America consider this their favorite poem. Why do you think so?
- A moral is something that you can learn from a story, a poem or an experience. Does this poem have a moral?
- Think of some major decisions a person makes in their life. Make a list with a partner.
- Have you had to make any major decisions? Did you take the road less traveled by?

Teacher's Notes - The Road not Taken

by Lindsay Clandfield

Level: Upper Intermediate +

Note: This lesson plan combines the language and personal growth approaches to teaching literature. Students read one of America's favorite poems and analyze it in terms of the language the poet uses. By looking at ways the language is used in the poem (stylistics) students are made aware of differences between it and Standard English. The follow up is primarily a series of speaking activities to elicit students' opinions and feelings about the piece they have just read.

Choices and Decisions

Have the students do this in pairs or small groups. You could do this part without giving them the handout just yet.

Before You Read

If you have decided to hold back the handout, write the words on the board and set the task for students. Feedback on what they think the poem will be about.

Comprehension

When students have read the poem, ask them to first turn to a partner and explain what they understood by the poem. Then set the questions.

Answers will vary. Here is one interpretation.

- a) Both are "fair". One seems to be less walked on and grassy, although people have passed on both of them.
- b) Although he doesn't specifically say, one would assume that he is happy with his choice.
- c) Yes, because he stood for a long time debating which one to take.
- d) The author had to make a major decision in his life on what he wanted to do. He chose the more difficult way but has no regrets.

If students have difficulty with individual words, now is the time to check that they understand them. You can do this with the whole class or have them check the words in their dictionaries.

Language Work

- a) both; one; it; the other; them; the first
- b) And I was sorry that I could not take both;
And I was one traveler, I stood for a long time
Then I took the other which was just as fair and it had the better claim
Because I knew how way leads on to way I doubted if I would ever come back
- c) The repetition of the word "I" gives the effect of a pause (students should respect this while reading the poem aloud). The poet, imagining that he talking about his life as an old man and is giving a sigh while explaining his choice.

Discussion

Students should do this in pairs or in small groups. Conduct feedback at the end.