Objectives

1. Engage students in the language, tone, poetic devices and imagery of Robert Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” so that they are prepared to discuss and write about the poem.

2. Practice and reinforce the following Grades 9-10 ELA Common Core Standards for reading literature, writing, and speaking and listening:

   - **READING: LITERATURE – RL.9-10.1-6, 10**
   - **WRITING – W.9-10.1-10**
   - **SPEAKING AND LISTENING – SL.9-10.1-6**

Time

130 minutes (with up to an additional 220 minutes of extension possibilities)

Materials

SyncTV Premium Lesson on Robert Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”

Overview

This poem is an anchor of early 20th century American Literature. In the face of modernism, where poets like TS Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein were actively working against formal structure and diction, Robert Frost steadied himself in these conventions and has long been admired for his mastery of meter and rhyme. His work, though, should not be seen as oblivious of the time; “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” is heavy with doubt and a dark sense of choice, anticipating that the country and the culture was on the verge of a dramatic transformation. The poem’s well-crafted metered stanzas, unifying rhyme, and simple diction and imagery allow it to be accessed easily, and provide opportunity for it to be read several times over. When studied and discussed, the layers of meaning in Frost’s poem bloom and intensify well beyond its few words and chimes. Close examination of this excerpt will offer students the opportunity to think and write critically about a classic piece of poetry, consistent with the ELA Common Core Standards for Grades 9-10.
Background (10 minutes)

1. **Watch the Preview** *(SL.9-10.1-2)*. As a group, watch the video preview of the premium lesson. After viewing, use the following questions to spur a discussion:

   a. What images stand out for you and why? What associations do you make with the images in the preview? What do all these images have in common?

   b. What sense do you get from the preview about the emotional weight of the poem? What specifically (images, music, questions asked by the narrator) make you feel this way?

   c. In general, how does a poem come across as dark or ominous (vs. light/funny, romantic, or angry)? If a director has the capability of hiring an actor that “looks the part” of the feeling a film is supposed to convey, and a visual artist has an array of materials and colors with which to express the tone and subject of a piece, what tools do writers have to achieve the same effects?

Extension (additional 60 minutes)

   d. **Think** *(SL.9-10.1, 3)*. Place students in pairs, each student with an index card or a half-sheet of paper. Have everyone think (without sharing) of a specific public place (examples: a park, the grocery store, a movie theater). They will NOT write the name of the place down—instead, have them write three adjectives for the place. After they’ve finished they will switch with their partner. Next, each student should look at the three adjectives their partner has written and make their best guess for the place the adjectives describe and write it on the back of the card or sheet of paper. When all are finished, have them switch back and take measure, with examples, of how many people guessed the correct location. Likely there will be many who did not guess the right place. Model the same exercise as a whole class by writing three adjectives on the board: noisy, crowded, expensive. Have the students make a few guesses to what your place is (shopping mall? airport food court? sports arena?). Now tell the students that instead of giving adjectives as clues, you are going to tell them three nouns that belong in the place; list: funnel cakes, oversized plush animals, distorted mirrors, and they should immediately guess a fairground or amusement park.

   e. **Discuss** *(SL.9-10.1, 3 and ELL)*. Talk about the descriptive power of nouns v. adjectives. Though adjectives are known by definition as descriptive words, this exercise demonstrates how much more specific the right noun can be. Ask the students to offer examples from everyday life of when it would be more appropriate or effective to use strong nouns instead of adjectives. (Possible applications: giving directions, ordering food at a restaurant, complimenting your sweetheart, etc.)

   f. **Research** *(W.9-10.7)*. Either in class or for homework, have students research the life and work of Robert Frost online, composing a short summary paragraph for the following class. Who was he? When did he live? Why is his work considered important, and among whom? How did he conform to or differ from the prevailing poetic movements of his time?

Engaging the Text (120 minutes)

2. **Read the Text** *(30 minutes)*
a. **Read and Annotate** (*RL.9-10.1-5*). Have students read and annotate the introduction and excerpt. If your classroom has a projector, you may want to model note-taking skills by reading and annotating the first stanza as a class. Underline unknown words or passages that are confusing; mark sentences that express the author’s key ideas or otherwise seem significant. If students are completing as a homework assignment, ask them to write any questions they have into the annotation tool—these questions are visible to you after the students submit their writing assignments or beforehand if you use the “Mimic” function to access the students’ accounts.

i. **Read.** Ask the students to read the introduction and have a student volunteer to read the poem aloud. Each student should have the poem in front of them and, if possible, it should also be projected on the board.

ii. **“What do you notice?”** After hearing it for the first time, ask the students, “What do you notice?” This should be a free-form discussion; anything that attracts attention in the poem is worth mentioning. If the conversation is having a hard time getting started, tell the students to pretend you’ve taken the poem away from them after the first reading and you just want to know what they remember about it.

iii. **Read again with a pencil.** Have another student read the poem aloud a second time, or use the audio feature on the site. This time, students should underline images, phrases, or lines that appeal to them. Anything goes: something that sounds nice, a phrase that rings true, or something that is clearly stated. Ask that they underline at least three things as they listen to the poem. At the same time, they should circle any words or phrases that are unfamiliar to clarify later.

iv. **Ask questions.** Each student should write at least two specific questions they have about this poem.

b. **Discuss** (*SL.9-10.1, 3*). Have students get into small groups or pairs and briefly discuss the questions and inferences they had while reading. As a class, discuss the following: Is this poem open to different interpretations? Is there anything beneath the simplicity on the surface? Is this poem literal or metaphorical, or both? Why?

**Extension (additional 20 minutes)**

c. **Listen and Discuss** (*SL.9-10.1-2*). As a class, listen to the audio reading of the text. Ask students to share how their understanding of the text changed after listening. What additional images came to mind? What words did the author use to develop the setting?

d. **Comprehend** (*RL.9-10.1-5, 10*). Have students complete the multiple-choice questions. Collect papers or discuss answers as a class.

e. **Vocabulary Building** (*SL.9-10.1 and ELL*). As a class, discuss some poetry terms and definitions that will aid in students’ understanding of the Frost poem. (Suggested terms: *iambic pentameter, stanza, meter, literal v. figurative, metaphor*.) Compile a master list of these terms and use this list as the basis for vocabulary acquisition as well as a basic introduction to the world of poetry. (A good glossary of terms can be found at [http://www.poemofquotes.com/articles/poetry_forms.php](http://www.poemofquotes.com/articles/poetry_forms.php))
3. Watch SyncTV (30 minutes)

   a. **Watch.** Either watch the SyncTV discussion as a class or ask students to watch it on their individual computers.

   b. **Focus (SL.9-10.1-3 and RL.9-10.2).** From 1:19-2:11 the SyncTV students set up the basic argument at hand: is this a “nice” poem about an idyllic winter scene or is there something darker or more revealing beneath the surface? Have students consider their own responses to this question.

   c. **Focus (SL.9-10.1-3 and RL.9-10.1-2, 4).** Stretching from 2:35-3:20, the model students grapple with their approaches to the text: Troy offers an explanation; Logan questions the significance of the horse and the owner; Lila states that the poem is about “choices” made. Model this section to show how students can begin to break down the important issues within a poetry text.

   d. **Focus (SL.9-10.1-3 and RL.9-10.4).** Finally, from 4:41-5:28, Troy points out the importance of the choice of the word “but” in the poem’s final stanza. Use this portion of the episode to show students how strongly a simple word choice can affect a text’s overall meaning, using the SyncTV students’ analysis as a model for this.

   e. **Discuss (SL.9-10.1-4 and RL.9-10.1-5, 10).** After watching the model discussion, have a conversation with the class about the ideas discussed in the SyncTV episode. What new thoughts do they have after hearing the students’ discussion? Next, divide students into small groups (3-4 students). Move around the room monitoring groups as students follow the SyncTV episode as a model to discuss some of the following questions:

      i. What are the key images in the piece? Go through the text and circle the nouns to be sure your list is complete. What do these images have in common? Which images stick out? Why?

      ii. Follow up this literal understanding of what is going on in the poem by analyzing the figurative meaning of one of the poem’s key images: snow. What are the physical characteristics of snow? Where and when does it come about? What emotions are associated with snow? Do these associated emotions have any figurative relationship with the ideas presented in the poem?

      iii. In the SyncTV episode, the students identify a few moments where there is a sense of choice or uncertainty in the poem. Using the text of the poem, pick out every line, phrase, or word choice that alludes to a sense of unknowing. Then, go through the poem again and look for moments when he speaker is expressing certainty. Based on these two lists, what do you think the internal conflict of the speaker could be?

      iv. Now analyze this poem by breaking down its form and rhythmic pattern? What particular pattern does Frost follow in each of the four constructed stanzas? Are there any exceptions to this pattern?

      v. Why is the last line repeated twice? What is the effect of this repetition? Discuss various interpretations of its significance.

      vi. Do you feel this poem is dark and “creepy,” as some students in the SyncTV episode say, or does it strike you more as peaceful and calming? Poll your position within your group and get together with those who share
your opinion. Find at least three examples from the text that support your point and then share within the group.

Extension (additional 60 minutes)

f. **Evaluate (SL.9-10.1-3).** Watch the SyncTV episode again (as a whole class if possible). Before watching, assign each of your students one of the four students in the episode to follow. Have your students keep a running list of points that each student makes. Ask students to pay close attention to how (e.g. citing textual evidence, using personal examples) the students in the episode prove their points. When the episode has finished, discuss each of the characters and evaluate the quality of their arguments. What makes some arguments stronger than others? What are some of the best and worst points made about the text? How and why?

g. **Brainstorm (RL.9-10.1, 4 and W.9-10.9).** Continue exploration of the poem’s figurative meanings by having students list associations that come to mind with the rest of the images in the poem (similar to discussion activity 2). Finally, share different lists of interpretations as a class and look for evidence in the poem that might support or eliminate your projections.

h. **Read, Watch, Discuss (SL.9-10.1-2 and W.9-10.7).** Read the short paragraph about this poem and its author, then watch the video of Frost reading “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” at [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/poetryeverywhere/frost.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/poetryeverywhere/frost.html). Discuss impressions of Frost’s reading of his classic poem.

4. **Think (10 minutes)**
   
a. **Respond (W.9-10.1, 4).** Ask students to read the “Think” questions, watch the corresponding video clips, and respond to the questions, either in class or for homework.

5. **Write (50 minutes)**
   
a. **Discuss (SL.9-10.1).** Read the prompt you have chosen for students, and then solicit questions regarding the prompt or the assignment expectations. Whichever prompt you have chosen, make sure you are clear about the assignment expectations and the rubric by which you and the other students will be evaluating them.

b. **Organize (RL.9-10.1-5, 10 and W.9-10.1-2, 5).** Ask students to go back and annotate the text with the prompt in mind. They should be organizing their thoughts and the points they’ll address in their writing as they make annotations. If you’ve worked on outlining or other organizational tools for writing, this is a good place to apply them.

c. **Write (W.9-10.1-2, 4-6, 8-10).** Have students go through the writing process of planning, revising, editing, and publishing their writing responses.

d. **Review (W.9-10.4-6).** Use the StudySync “Review” feature to have students complete one to two evaluations of their peers’ work based on your chosen review rubric. Have the students look at and reflect upon the peer evaluations of their own writing. What might you do differently in a revision? How might you strengthen the writing and the ideas?
Extension (additional 80 minutes)

e. Write *(W.9-10.1-2, 4-6, 8-10)*. For homework, have students write an essay using one of the prompts you did not chose to do in class. Students should publish their responses online.

f. Write Creatively *(W.9-10.3-5, 9)*. Turn this poem into a short story of at least 300 words, in prose form. Students should keep details from the poem intact while creating a few of their own to fill in the gaps. Considerations: Where is the narrator going? Whose property is he trespassing on? What promises does he have to keep? Encourage students to make creative inferences from the poem while writing their short stories about “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” Give the characters names and dialogue while retaining the spirit of Frost’s original work.
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Key Vocabulary

1. queer (adj.) – Odd or unusual; strange
2. harness (n.) – A set of straps fitted on a horse so that it can carry a heavy load
3. downy (adj.) – Resembling or containing soft, small feathers

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. In line 2, his is referring to _____________.
   a. the narrator of the poem
   b. the horse the narrator is riding
   c. the owner of the property where the poem takes place
   d. the owner of the village

2. This poem takes place _____________.
   a. in the woods on someone else’s property
   b. in Pennsylvania
   c. just before sunrise
   d. on a stranger’s farm

3. In line 5, queer most closely means _____________.
   a. unusual
   b. eccentric
   c. sick
   d. suspicious

4. This poem is written in _____________. (Use a dictionary if any terms are unfamiliar!)
   a. prose
   b. free verse
   c. iambic quadrameter
   d. iambic pentameter

5. The only stanza that diverges from the form is the ____________ stanza.
   a. first
   b. second
   c. third
   d. fourth

6. In line 9, he refers to _____________.
   a. the narrator
   b. the narrator’s horse
   c. the owner of the property
   d. an unknown person

7. We can infer that the horse is puzzled because _____________.
   a. he doesn’t understand why they’re in these woods
   b. they are miles away from familiar territory
   c. they seemed to have stopped for no reason at all
   d. all of the above
8. In line 14, the promises mentioned are being kept between the narrator and ____________________.
   a. himself
   b. the villagers
   c. the owner of the property
   d. someone uncertain

9. The third line of each stanza (except the last) _________________.
   a. introduces the rhyme for the stanza to come
   b. is shorter than the others
   c. is not in an iambic format
   d. all of the above

10. In each verse, the emphasis or emphases is/are placed on the _____________________.
    a. odd syllables
    b. even syllables
    c. first syllable
    d. last syllable

Answer Key

1. C
2. A
3. A
4. C
5. D
6. B
7. D
8. D
9. A
10. B
Further Assignments

1. Ask students to rewrite their written responses to the writing prompt based on their peers’ feedback and/or their self-assessments. *(W.9-10.4-6)*

2. In small groups or as a class, have the students track every mention or allusion to the season in which the poem takes place. Individually, each student should try to rewrite the poem in Fall, Spring, or Summer, using the poem as a guide for structure and meaning. Students may either indulge in the creative possibilities of the assignment, allowing the poem to become different and afterwards, in a paragraph, describing why/how the poem is different when placed in the context of a new season, OR students may describe in several paragraphs, how the poem’s references to winter are inextricable from its meaning. *(SL.9-10.1-3 and RL.9-10.1 and W.9-10.1-4, 9)*

3. Ask students to look up and read information on Frost’s biography and other works. Then, each should discuss in a few paragraphs why Frost called “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” his “best bid for remembrance.” Is the poem undeniably his best work? Does it have some inherent time-safe qualities? Do you agree with Frost’s opinion? Why or why not? *(W.9-10.7-9)*

4. Ask students to map out the rhyme scheme of the poem, noting the order of these repetitions. Then ask each student to write his/her own poem using the same rhyme scheme—and not just the pattern but the actual rhymes (for example, lines 1, 2, and 4 will end in the long O sound and line 3 will rhyme with “here”). Ask students to share their experience working with rhyme—was it difficult to be constricted to so few words? Did you plan out the rhymes ahead of time and work toward the end of the line or fold in the rhyming word at the last moment? What do you think was your most surprising rhyme-word? *(RL.9-10.1, 5 and W.9-10.3-4, 9 and SL.9-10.1, 4)*

5. Assign students the task of writing, in prose or in verse, the perspective of the man who owns the woods. This narrative could take place at the exact same moment of the poem or as a response to knowing the “Snowy Woods” narrator came through his property. *(W.9-10.3-4, 9)*

6. In groups, have students draw scenes of each of the four stanzas and create, using iMovie (or similar multimedia program), an illustrated reading of Frost’s poem. Students should record audio of their own readings of “Stopping by Woods” and sync this audio with the corresponding illustrations. *(SL.9-10.1, 4-5 and ELL)*