

## Name Model

Text "Because I could not stop for Death," Emily Dickinson and "Home Burial," Robert Frost

One of the defining factors of poetry is its efficient use of imagery and symbolism to communicate a message to the reader. "Efficient" because poems tend to be shorter than longer and so the author must make creative yet precise word choices. Both Emily Dickinson in her poem "Because I could not stop for Death," and Robert Frost in "Home Burial," use symbolic imagery to evoke important themes in their stories.

In "Because I could not stop for Death," Dickinson uses symbolism to help describe the passage from life to death and eternity. Already in line 3, the reader encounters the word "carriage," which suggests the author is embarking on some sort of journey with Death and Immortality. In stanza 3, Dickinson recalls passing three distinct scenes. In the first, the passengers pass a "school, where children strove "At recess, in the ring." In the second, they see a field of grain, and in the third they pass the setting sun. These three episodes indicate to the reader the passing from youth - children at school - to middle age growth - the grain - the death - the sun fades out. In these four lines, Dickinson gives the reader clues that she is talking about a voyage to eternity.

Dickinson continues to use strong symbolism in the following stanza when she says how she felt cold on account of the cool "dews." This feeling further suggests that she has now passed from the living to the dead world as she feels colder. Indeed, in the next stanza the reader sees the references to a grave. The last two lines of stanza 4 show that the narrator is rather unprepared for this new, colder reality, as she is only wearing light clothing. This might symbolize that either Death is not as civil as she had thought and did not warn her of the coldness of the after life, or that she is preparing for a rather comfortable time in eternity with the companion Immortality. After all, they only "paused before a house that seemed A swelling in the ground," hinting that they made only a short visit to the grave (lines 17-18).

While Frost does not use as much symbolism as Dickinson in his "Home Burial," there are a couple examples to note. Most of the poem takes place on a staircase within the house. This offers a good visual for readers to have in mind as they read through the couple's quarrel. At the beginning of the poem, the woman is at the top and the man is at the bottom, wishing to know what the woman does. This reflects a power dynamic that is played out on the stairs - the person who is at the top has more power, while the person at the bottom loses it. When the man "mounts" the staircase in line 11, he gains power in the conversation and discovers what she has been gazing at. Again, in line 42, the man says he "won't come down the stairs" thus maintaining his advantage. In response to his advantage of the staircase, the woman turns to the door latch in line 47. This latch in turn gives her power as she threatens escaping the house altogether.

Both of these poems are good examples of how poets use symbolism to go beyond the literal meaning of the words to help carry a message to the reader. Dickinson's symbolism gradually reveals her deathly voyage, while Frost's helps animate an icy relationship in a house whose burial appears imminent.