

Fire and Ice

Introduction

This poem has been written by Robert Frost. This is about the possible destruction of the Mother Earth.

Summary

In this poem, Robert Frost refers to the two predictions that have been made on how the world will end. Some say it will end in fire. According to others, it will end in ice. The poet equates fire with desire. He says that he has tasted desire and he knows that man's desire for supremacy can ultimately lead to the destruction of this planet. He also means that to fulfil his many desires man exploits natural resources and this will ultimately result in the destruction of this planet. He then says that the world can also end by ice or extreme coldness. He then equates ice with hate. Hatred in the hearts of people towards their fellow human-beings will also result in the end of this world. Terrorism is one form of hatred and it has led to substantial loss to life and property in recent times. So, according to Frost, the world is full of desire and hatred and these will ultimately cause the destruction of earth.

Message

The poet wants to convey the message that if mankind is not able to control its desire and feeling of hatred, then the Earth would definitely come to an end.



Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow:

1. Some say the world will end in fire
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favour fire.

- (a) What does 'ice' stand for in the given extract?
(b) Whom does the poet favour?
(c) The lines from the poem tell us that
(i) the poet advises people to be carefree
(ii) the poet wants us to be fearless
(iii) the poet knows the consequences of desires
(iv) the poet has been a victim of hatred
(d) What is the rhyme scheme of the extract?

Answers

- (a) In the given extract, 'ice' stands for hatred.
(b) The poet favours the people who think that the world will end in fire. He says that he has tasted desire and he knows that man's desire for supremacy can lead to the destruction of this planet.
(c) (iii) the poet knows the consequences of desires
(d) abaa
2. But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice. (CBSE SQP 2023-24)

- (a) Fill the blank with one word.
When the speaker says that ice could also bring about the end of the world, he refers to, as the means for destruction.
(b) What does the speaker's alignment with those who favour ice, suggest?
(c) Which of the following best describes the speaker's attitude towards destruction caused by ice?
(i) Indifferent (ii) Fearful
(iii) Dismissive (iv) Respectful
(d) Comment on the poet's use of language in these lines.

Answers

- (a) hatred/bitterness
(b) The speaker's alignment with those who favour ice suggests that they have seen the destructive consequences of a lack of empathy and emotional connection.
(c) (iv) Respectful

- (d) The language used in these lines is simple and straightforward. The words and phrases are easy to understand and the poem is written in a conversational tone. Despite its simplicity, however, the poem carries a profound message about the destructive power of both fire and ice, and the inevitability of destruction.



Short Answer Type Questions

- Q 1. What message does the poet want to convey through the poem 'Fire and Ice'?

Ans. Frost cautions the humanity against the end of this world. He says that man by nature has become selfish, greedy and indifferent. He says that if man is not able to control his feelings of desire and hate, then this would ultimately lead to the destruction of Mother Earth.

- Q 2. 'But if it had to perish twice; I think I know enough of hate.' What does 'it' refer to? How will it perish twice?

Ans. Here 'it' refers to the earth or the world. The poet says that people hold different opinions about the earth or the end of the world. Some say 'fire', which stands for desire, will destroy the world. Some say 'ice', which stands for hatred, can also destroy the world. The poet wants to say that a world destroyed by desire can be rebuilt but this can again perish by the feelings of hatred in the hearts of people for one-another.

- Q 3. 'To say that for destruction ice is also great.' For the poet, what does 'ice' stand for? How is it sufficient to bring destruction?

Ans. 'Ice' stands for hatred. Hatred may be religious, communal or of any other type. According to the poet, there is enough hatred in the world which can destroy the physical world one day.

- Q 4. There are many ideas about how the world will 'end'. Do you think the world will end some day? Have you ever thought what would happen if the sun got so hot that it 'burst', or grew colder and colder?

Ans. Yes, I think the world will end one day, though it might take billions and billions of years. If the sun got very hot or grew colder and colder, there would be no oxygen or vegetation—all creatures would die and the world would perish.

- Q 5. Explain why the poet personally holds the conviction that the world will primarily end in fire?

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Ans. The poet's personal conviction that the world will primarily end in fire indicates two reasons:
(i) He has been a victim of the fiery aspect of desire.
(ii) He seems to have experienced the destructive effects of desire in his life.



Long Answer Type Questions ▼

Q 1. What is the underlying idea of the poem 'Fire and Ice'?

Ans. The underlying idea of the poem, 'Fire and Ice' is the destruction of the world due to human avarice and hatred. The poet is saying that human desire is like fire, which will spread, engulf and destroy the whole world. He also says that the feeling of hatred is growing amongst the people.

This he compares with ice. He says that once hatred gets into one's heart, his heart becomes cold. He then indulges in evil deeds, taking lives of innocent people. This is evident today by the numerous terrorist attacks. So, according to the poet, the feelings of desire and hate can lead to the end of this world.

Q 2. How does the tone make the words stronger or the meaning more apparent in 'Fire and Ice'?

Ans. The tone of a poem is the poet's attitude which is felt by the reader. So, the tone in a poem of praise is approval. Tone is significant in a poem, because poems derive much of their meaning from tone.

The poem 'Fire and Ice' is essentially an epigram. So, like a typical epigram its tone is satirical with a witty and ingenious ending. The simple yet symbolic diction of the poem creates an ironic and accepting tone, supporting the theme that if not restrained, the imbalance of emotions will eventually lead to destruction. The tone of the poet is also conclusive. It appears that he believes, beyond doubt, that the **world** will end, either in one way or the other.