

The Peace of Wild Things Formative Assessment #1

Directions: You will follow along as your teacher reads Robert Frost's poem, "Birches" below. Then you will use what have learned about showing vs. telling to answer the questions that follow.

Birches by Robert Frost

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust--
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows--
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
Whose only play was what he found himself,
Summer or winter, and could play alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.

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And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.
I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

1. Which of the following is the best example of showing or imagery?
 - A. "I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay"
 - B. "Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—"
 - C. "So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be."
 - D. "Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better."
2. Which of the following is the best example of telling?
 - A. "They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel."
 - B. "Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun."
 - C. "I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over."
 - D. "Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open."

B is the best answer because Frost uses strong imagery here, appealing to his readers' senses of sight and sound. A, C, and D are good examples of telling. Frost directly tells his readers what he wants them to know in these lines.

C is the best answer because Frost directly tells, rather than shows, here. A, B, and D are good examples of imagery or showing; Frost appeals to readers' senses of sight, sound, and feeling in these lines.

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3. If you had to choose a **line (or lines)** that best reveals Frost's intended meaning for this poem, which of the following lines would you choose?

- A. "I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows—"
- B. "One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,"
- C. "So was I once myself a swinger of birches."
- D. "I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over."

D is the best answer here. Although A, and C are examples of telling, they don't get to the heart of Frost's message. B is a good example of a supporting image. D reflects Frost's intended meaning: it's good to get away from the trials and tribulations of living on earth for a while, but it's also good—and necessary—to return.

4. Write the line(s) you selected from #3 above. This is the line that best reveals the poem's intended meaning:

**I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And the come back to it and begin over.**

Now, using this line as the **meaning** (the main idea) of the poem, provide **examples from this poem** that contain imagery (showing) that supports or leads readers to this idea. An example could be a single line or a group of lines. Copy these examples directly from the poem:

- 1) It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.

These are just two examples of imagery that supports, or leads into, Frost's intended meaning. Other examples from earlier in the poem would also work as supporting imagery.

- 2) I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.