

POETRY: "Nothing Gold Can Stay" • SKILL: Text Analysis

Analyzing Poetry

Section 1: Definitions

Follow the directions in the boxes. Check a dictionary for the definitions and an encyclopedia for the allusion. (For now, ignore the circles and lines you see drawn on the poem.)

Briefly explain this allusion.
What is Eden?

Nothing Gold Can Stay

By Robert Frost

1 Nature's first green is gold,
 2 Her hardest hue to hold.
 3 Her early leaf's a flower;
 4 But only so an hour.
 5 Then leaf subsides to leaf,
 6 So Eden sank to grief,
 7 So dawn goes down to day
 8 Nothing gold can stay.

Define *hue*.

Define *subsid*es.

Section 2: Sound Devices

Write on the poem above to answer the questions in this section.

1. We circled the first set of rhyming words (*gold* and *hold*). **Circle the others.**
2. *Alliteration* is when two or more words that are near each other start with the same sound. We've underlined the first case of alliteration (*green* and *gold* in line 1). **Underline two more.**
3. *Assonance* is when two or more words that are near each other contain the same vowel sound, as in the sentence "Jenny bent down and petted the hen." We've double-underlined two cases of assonance in the poem (*nature* and *first* in line 1, and *her* and *early* in line 3). **Double-underline two more.**

Section 3: Line-By-Line

In this section, you will analyze the poem mostly one or two lines at a time. There are no “right” answers to many of these questions; you just need to support your interpretation with text evidence.

Lines 1-4

4. In line 1, what is “nature’s first green”? *Hint*: Think about what happens in the spring.

5. The speaker says that nature’s first green “is gold.” What are some words, ideas, images, or emotions that we associate with gold? Are these associations mostly positive or negative?

6. Considering your answer to question 5, what is the speaker saying about “nature’s first green” when he calls it “gold”?

7. Think of another meaning for the first line. How could “nature’s first green” *literally* be gold (the color)? *Hint*: Reread line 3.

8. In line 2, the speaker says that gold is nature’s “hardest hue to hold.” As it is used in this line, what does *hold* mean?

9. In lines 3 and 4, the speaker says that nature’s early leaf is a flower that lasts only for “an hour.” Do you think he means this literally—that the flower dies after one hour? If he doesn’t mean it literally, what is the speaker saying here?

10. In your own words, briefly summarize what the speaker is saying in lines 1 to 4.

Lines 5-8

11. One could say that a flower *grows* into a leaf, or that a leaf *replaces* a flower, but in line 5, the poet uses the word *subsides* to describe the change from the early leaf (or flower) to the mature leaf. How does this word choice affect the meaning or tone of this line?

12. Identify a word or phrase in line 6 and a word or phrase in line 7 similar in meaning to *subsides*.

13. The title and last line of the poem state that “nothing gold can stay.” In lines 6 and 7, what is “gold” that does not “stay”?

14. Consider the three things in the poem that change: a bud, Eden, and dawn. What do these three things have in common?

Section 4: The Big Picture

Again, there is no “right” answer; you should answer according to *your* interpretation of the poem. Just be sure to support your ideas with text evidence.

15. What message or idea about change does the speaker express in “Nothing Gold Can Stay”? Explain, using text evidence to support your answer.