

## FIRE AND ICE

Robert Frost

*According to one of Frost's biographers, "Fire and Ice" was inspired by a passage in Canto 32 of Dante's 'Inferno'. Dante's 'Inferno' describes a fiery hell in which the worst traitors are submerged in a lake of ice. The nine lines of the poem can be paralleled to the nine rings of Hell, where the upper layers deal with fire and the lower layers with ice. Like the downward funnel of the rings of Hell, the poem narrows down in the last two lines. Moreover, the rhyme scheme – ABA ABC BCB — is similar to the one Dante invented for Inferno.*

### Theme:

Though it is a very short poem, it is highly thought provoking. It deals with the idea of how the world would end. The poet presents two ways; with fire or ice, each representing desire and hate respectively. The poem presents both fire and ice as the likely causes for the world's demise.

In a deeper sense, the poem deals with the downfall of each individual, fuelled by intense emotions of desire and hate.

### Summary:

The poet begins by expressing the two opposing beliefs concerning the end of the world. While some people believe that the world would end in fire, others believe that ice would be the cause. The poet equates fire to intense emotions like desire and passion and since he has experienced the destructive force of desire, he holds with (agree with) those who favour fire.

The poet also has enough knowledge of hate, which he compares to ice. So he believes that if the world had to perish (end) twice, ice would serve as an equally destructive tool.

The conclusion that the world can perish both by fire and ice, is based on the poet's personal experience of the destructive forces of both desire and hate.

### Poetic devices:

1. **Alliteration:** some say the world will end in fire  
    Some say in ice  
    I hold with those who favour fire
2. **Anaphora:** the repetition of a word or expression at the start of two or more consecutive lines.  
    Example - "Some say" is repeated at the start of lines 1 and 2
3. **Symbolism:** fire and ice are symbolic of desire and hate.

### Questions:

1. **What does fire and ice stand for?**  
'Fire' stands for greed, avarice, lust, conflict and fury. 'Ice' stands for cruelty, intolerance, rigidity, insensitivity, coldness, indifference and hatred.

### Extract based questions:

1. **How will the world end?**  
a) Fire  
b) ice  
c) Water  
d) both (a) and (b)  
Ans) (d)

2. Fire is compared to-

a) Desire

b) hate

c). lust

d) coldness

Ans) (a)

3. Hate is represented as-

a) Fire

b) water

c). ice

d) none of the above

Ans) (c)

4. The poet of 'Fire and Ice' is \_\_\_\_\_ (Robert Frost)

**Answer in 100-150 words:**

**1. How does the poet symbolically say that the world would end in both fire and ice?**

The poet believes that both fire and ice can be the cause of world's demise. Fire is symbolic of intense passions like desire, fury and lust, whereas ice represents indifference and hatred. People who are led by uncontrolled passions tend to become violent and harmful, causing the destruction of humanity and the world.

Ice on the other hand represents cold reasoning. Cold and icy reasoning numbs the human heart and fills it with hatred. The heart loses its warmth, love and sympathy, which are the emotions that keep humanity alive. The heart devoid of warmth becomes indifferent and insensitive. This lack of sensitiveness will eventually bring about the destruction of the world.