

Baby, it's cold outside



**ASSIGN
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This paper compares two works - that of Jack London's 'To Build A Fire' and Robert Frost's 'An Old Man's Winter Night.' Obviously common to the two literary works is the winter backdrop from which the story progresses. The two authors employ the winter season and use it to help move the story and create memorable images. For instance in Robert Frost's 'An Old Man's Winter Night,' the author creates a cozy image of an old man who is able to keep the household fires burning.

In fact readers find it especially warm as the Frost describes the man and the elements inside his home as almost contrasting to the one outside it. There is frost gathering outside the home as contrasting the lamp that tilt near his hand. There is a warm glow that one feels as he reads these lines. The poem speaks of this old man who has lived his life and now muses and relaxes in the comfort of his home. A reader can best get hold of this poem by establishing where the person is and what he is doing there.

Right off the start, we find that the author's feelings are an expository progression of an old man and his "creaking room" that creaks just like him. From the elements described by the author, the reader is presented with a house that has barrels all around him but he seems to be in control of these things. In fact, he is described as "having scared the cellar under him." This does not happen just once because we read that the author pens as scaring it "once again." Yet, that is not the only thing which the old man is in control of.

He also clomps off and "scared the outer night." The old man is completely in control of his environment even if he is old, for the author writes that in "clomping off", he also is able to scare the outer night, which by now must be

completely dark since the poem begins with a description that “ all out of doors are looking darkly in” on him. The sounds are also known well to the old man as the author states that these are familiar sounds including the roar of the trees as well as the crack of the branches.

Cracking of branches already connote strangers or unfamiliar people and possibly wild animals, yet the old man is not afraid of that at all. He is just seated there, contemplating on simple, mundane things that comfort him and give him the warm glow despite the fierce winter outside his house. It can be quite a puzzle for readers because an old man ought to be afraid of being alone in such a time of the year. Yet, he is perfectly comfortable, tending to his home and being satisfied that he is happy in whatever time of the day it was.

Even if it was very cold outside, he is able to sleep comfortably. He does not mind the icicles along the wall nor the snow upon his roof. The house is old and may not even be fit for any man to live in, much more an old man, for the log that makes it up moves and shifts with a jolt or any movement. The picture of an old man in his own house, keeping the house warm on a cold winter night may be inconceivable to any sane person because of the dangers that are linked to this. But this old man is able to do it on his own, without any help from anyone.

Meanwhile, Jack London's ' To Build a Fire' tells the story of a man and his dog as they travel through the Klondike region in Canada. They are returning to the camp where they envision to have a warm meal but they took the longer route to the camp since the man had to check if there were logs from Yukon. But the winter in Yukon was so strong with frigid temperatures. The

author writes that this kind of winter " was not merely colder than fifty below zero; it was colder than sixty below, than seventy below. It was seventy-five below zero. " Thus, this was going to be a long and arduous journey back to the camp.

Unlike Frost's old man in winter who had a cozy and warm place inside his home despite the harsh winter, the man in " To Build a Fire" had to think ahead so that he could avoid pools of freezing cold water hidden under the thin ice. These were hazardous spots along the way and the man had to order his dog to test the area since the weather was too harsh for the man to make it back to the camp. Along the way, we read how the man struggled to keep warm and to go back to the camp. It was a difficult way to travel and even his dog knew that it was not wise to travel in that condition at all.

We read this man who lacks the wisdom not to travel in that kind of weather as compared to the old man, this man was not aware of how to respond to his environment. He had not mastered nature at all. This was so unlike the old man who remained unperturbed. The man with the dog acted desperately amidst the winter. He was not sure that he would make it through. The two authors made use of the winter in different ways. Frost made winter the character's ally, because the old man was able to sleep despite the cold winter.

But London uses winter as the adversary of the man with the dog. They fight off nature and the dangers that lurk in every step they take. Readers become engrossed with the plight of the man. Readers are almost sure that the man cannot make it because he does not even have control of his legs and fingers and arms as he walks, flailing them in desperation. While the old

man in the poem is in complete control of his surroundings, feeling cozy and warm all over, the other man no longer is in control of anything, not even his own dog.

His dog senses the danger from his master's voice and does not beckon to his calls and commands. There would be a completely different story if the element of the winter season was changed to the weather in the tropics. The old man would probably feel warm and go for a walk outside, where it might be hazardous as he is alone with no one to help him in time of need. The man with the dog would simply breeze through the journey back to the camp, finding his friends and family waiting eagerly for him. It would be a fast and easy journey.

But Jack London wanted to illustrate how a desperate man responds in times of crisis. Readers get the exact feeling that the author wants to send out to his readers because for a second, one goes back to the text at the end when the author pens, " Then the man drowsed off into what seemed to him the most comfortable and satisfying sleep he had ever known. " How very contrasting the sleep of the old man in Frost's poem when we read, " Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted, And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept. "