

The dawn is coming:
"frost at midnight's"
hope for the next
generation



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It's a common hope in the life of parents that their children will go on and live more successful lives. That their child will learn the lessons their parents taught them and the road their parents laid out for them to lead them to a more promising future. In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "The Frost at Midnight," we see the hopeful parent theme in Coleridge's use of opposites, context, and word choice.

Even within the title we immediately see literary archetypes at work. Frost is a naturally occurring phenomenon that works rather slowly, has a tendency to kill living things, and usually only works at night or better said at the close of the day. Frost's definition in this sense can almost exactly be exchanged with the death if we are to personify it formally as Death. Death is a naturally occurring thing, Death tends to end one's life, and Death usually takes its time and comes for them at the end of their life. So the very first word in the title of the poem suggests death. The second part of the title is naming a very unique time of day. In all the minutes and hour in the day Coleridge chooses the exact minute of the day when one day dies and a brand new day begins. So the title alludes that Death is coming and it is the end of a day, or someone's day. We aren't sure exactly who from the title alone, but the context gives us more as to whose day is over. On line four of Coleridge's poem the speaker makes a point to the reader that the "inmates" of his cottage are all at rest, except for the speaker who addresses themselves on line five. The only other member of the household that the speaker calls out in the poem is their infant. So through the context it is obvious who the two important characters are within this poem. This is important because it is

clear that the infant specifically is the speaker's which means it is a succeeding generation.

The infant is mentioned only once more in detail until line forty four. On line forty-four the poem becomes a letter filled with optimism. The language used to describe the sleeping infant becomes words of softness and frailty as opposed to the imagery from the beginning of the poem and the previous stanza. At the beginning of the poem the author talks about an extreme silence but notes that the dying fire is companionable and that it understands and sympathizes with him. The speaker talks in the next stanza of being stuck behind bars, and items from the speaker's childhood that " Haunted him" (line 31), and " so I brooded all the following morn," (line 36), and lines thirty-nine through line forty-three suggests that the speaker was anxiously waiting for someone who never came. The entirety of this stanza's focus and specific word choice allows Coleridge to give the reader a certain level of anxiety. Starting with line forty five we see words like " gentle," and " deep calm," and immediately the reader is brought back down to this level of tranquility.

We see for the first time that this is a message of hope to the speaker's infant with line forty-eight where the speaker says, " My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart/ with tender gladness, thus to look at thee,/ And think that thou shalt learn far other lore/ And in far other spaces! For I was reared/ in the great city, pent ' mid cloisters dim..." At this point it makes sense to the reader that everything leading up to this stanza was the speaker essentially saying in long hand that he regretted being raised in a large stone city. He wanted to be in the countryside alongside nature who is later referred to as "<https://assignbuster.com/the-dawn-is-coming-frost-at-midnights-hope-for-the-next-generation/>

the Great Universal Teacher." Coleridge uses opposites not only in these two stanzas but in several other instances in the poem to further illustrate this idea of hopefulness for his infant's future. Coleridge uses opposites throughout the whole poem. The first opposite that we see is Coleridge using the cold and the fire. The cold is slowly creeping across the outside and covering everything and the fire is dying. Even though frost and fire are opposites, they complement each other in this poem. The main contrast in the poem is the tone and language concerning the second and third stanza. Especially concerning the idea that the speaker has a hopeful outlook for their son. The biggest contrast comes from the word choice and contextual evidence the speaker gives us. The other big contrast is with the start and end of the poem. At the beginning the speaker makes a point that only this small part of nature, a dying flame, understands and sympathizes with him, but with his kid, God himself and nature in its entirety from great mountains and deep crags are here to aid and teach the young infant. The tone starts dark and solemn but ends light and hopeful.

In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "The Frost at Midnight," we see the hopeful parent theme in Coleridge's use of opposites, context, and word choice. Coleridge uses context to illustrate that the speaker feels hopeful for their infant's upbringing in the country. He uses opposites to contrast his dim life in a city with the openness of the country and his word choice specifically in stanzas two and three help drive Coleridge's points home.