

# Brevity of life essay



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Brevity of Life Robert Frost's poem "Out Out-" is a narrative that presents readers with a tale of a young boy's life cut tragically short. The title of the poem, "Out Out-," is what first alerts readers to the serious tone. The title, taken from a line in the Shakespearean play, foreshadows the death about to occur. Macbeth speaks a line after hearing of his wife's death, comparing Lady Macbeth's death to a candle blown out, he says "Out, out, brief candle" (Kennedy and Gioia 417).

The speaker tells the story in a somber and serious tone, almost as though he is a close observer of the events. The serene scene of the poem is set in Vermont at sunset, where a boy is cutting wood with a "buzz-saw" (1). When the boy's sister announces "[s]upper" (14), excited that his work is over, the boy drops the "buzz-saw" (1) and accidentally severs his hand. This proves to be a mortal wound, and the boy dies. In this poem, Frost utilizes imagery and personification to tell a tale of how life is unpredictable and fleeting.

Frost drapes the poem, "Out Out-," with vivid images that are both innocent and perilous to create the somber tone. Frost uses imagery to depict ferocity, as if he was trying to foreshadow the saw's role in the poem, "[t]he buzz-saw snarled and rattled in the yard" (1). A boy is sawing wood, "[s]weet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it" (3), in the serene setting, that is sunset in Vermont. The speaker tells readers that the boy may be too young for this type of work, "big boy, [d]oing a man's work" (23).

Excited when his sister calls "[s]upper" (14), the boy drops the saw, but severs his hand at the same time. The speaker uses suspense to describe

what happens with words such as the saw “[l]eaped out of the boy’s hand”(16), and his “ first outcry was a rueful laugh”(19). This provides readers a clear statement on the frailty of life. Frost gives his readers an image of the boy feeling pain by using forceful words such as “ outcry”(19), and conflicting words such as “ laugh” (19), and “ rueful “(19).

He describes the blood coming from the boy’s wounded hand as life that is spilling. When the doctor gives him anesthetic, “[h]e lay and puffed his lips out with his breath” (29), the boy is dying. The speaker through telling this story makes the reader think of how fragile life really is, and in an instant, it could end. Frost uses personification to great effect throughout the poem. The “ buzz-saw” (1), although technically an inanimate object, it is repeatedly said to have “ snarled” (1) and “ rattled” (1), as if it were a cognizant being.

The saw described to have “[l]eaped out of the boy’s hand” (16) in excitement, as if it “ knew what supper meant” (15). Personification is in the title that comes from the line in Macbeth, shocked to hear of his wife’s death he comments on the brevity of life, “ out, out, brief candle” (Kennedy and Gioia 417), where the death of Lady Macbeth is compared to that of an extinguishing candle. It refers to how unpredictable life is. The narrative poem, “ Out Out-,” by Robert Frost, uses imagery and personification to depict the uncertainty of life.

The main idea of the poem, the briefness of life, expressed bluntly in the final lines. These lines give a conclusion to the boy’s deadly mistake, “[n]o more to build on there. And they, since they [w]ere not the one dead, turned

to their affairs”(33). The speaker tells readers that life is fragile, and can end at any moment. The end of the poem is saying that when people die life does not stop. The speaker, though never identified, and the boy’s sister seemed to have had a close relationship to the boy, as if they were all family.

Although shocked and horrified by his death, they “ turned to their affairs”(34), because they were still alive, and therefore must keep living life.

Works Cited Frost, Robert. “ Out Out-. ” Literature An Introduction To Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing, 6th compact Ed. Gioia, Dana and Kennedy, X. J.

New York: Longman Pearson, 2010. Print Gioia, Dana and Kennedy, X. J.

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