

# A.B.M. College, Golmuri

## English Core

### I.A. & I.Com.

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## A Roadside Stand

**-Robert Frost**

### About the Poet

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco on 26 March, 1874. During his childhood he was sickly and neurotic. His father died of tuberculosis when he was only eleven years old. Frost and his family went to New England to have his father's remains buried there. They had to settle down at Salem in New Hampshire because they had no money to return back. He wrote poetry whenever he found time. In 1912 he made a crucial decision of his life. He chooses poetry for his vocation. He left for England with his wife and four children. Within six months of his arrival in England, Frost decided to publish a collection of his earlier poems. His poetic career was studded with honours such as membership in the American Academy and Pulitzer Prize. Robert Frost died in January 1963.

## Summary

‘A Roadside Stand’ portrays the poor country people whose earnest desire is to rise above their wretchedness. They attempt to do this by putting up roadside stands and trying to sell whatever they can to improve their lives. But the city people just speed by in their cars and do not even notice them, and when they do, it is with irritation at their having spoiled the natural landscape with their badly written signs.

Frost very aptly portrays the country people’s anger at the selfishness of the city dwellers for all they want is to attain the standard that they have seen promised to them in movies, but which they feel is being denied to them by the present government.

They do not want charity and the poet makes it very clear that the donors are actually ruining their lives by calling these so-called benevolent people greedy and beasts of prey. They move them to countryside to live near theatres and shops and encourage them to live idle lives, which will take away their peace and wits.

The poet feels pain on seeing the country people’s intense longing for a better life and their sadness at the non-fulfillment of their dreams when not even one car stops to inquire about the goods they are selling. The city dwellers are projected as being involved in the own lives with no thought for anyone else.

The poem shows the heartlessness of the city dwellers through the poet’s insane desire to put an end to the country people so that there would be relief from their complaints about the lack of upliftment of their lives. The poem ends with the poet’s remorse at these feelings when he realizes how he would feel if someone were to try to end his pain in the same way.

## **Explanation**

**A roadside stand** is a poem written by the highly-acclaimed poet, **Robert Frost** who is regarded for his realistic depiction of rural life using which he touched several difficult social themes of the time.

In this poem, the poet highlights the plight of the deprived villagers who are aching for some money to lead a prosperous life. The poet is also very critical of the way the city folks treat these villagers who are selling their locally produced goods and whizzing past them without a sense of empathy.

## Lines 1-6

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The occupants of the little old house have extended the shed in front, around the edge of the road where traffic passes by. Though it would be unfair to state that the shack-owners wanted a charity of bread, but nevertheless they seemed to implore the passers-by to stop and buy something from the shack. These deprived people long for the feel of the currency, the circulation of which flourishes the city folks.

## Lines 7-15

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But unfortunately, the refined traffic whizzed past, unmindful of the shack. Or, if by chance, any stopped, it would be with a feeling of reproach at this blot on the picturesque landscape. They are very perturbed to see the unimpressive and toppled up signboards. The shack offered for sale wild berries in a wooden quart (quarter of a gallon). The unqualitative local produce is highlighted with the usage of words like "*crook-necked*", "*squash with silver warts*".

The place also offered a blissful stay in the lap of nature for the ones who had money. Angry at the callous attitude of the so-called '*polished traffic*', the poet commands them to move ahead oblivious of the road-side stand.

## Lines 16-22

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The poet's concern is not about the blemish on the landscape but regarding the unvented sorrow of the shed-owners. Expressing the view point of these people, the poet converts their ardent desire to handle some city money, which may perhaps alleviate their sufferings as sometimes promised in movies. The political party in power actually deprive them of a prosperous life.

## Lines 23-31

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The poet quotes the news which highlights the evacuation and relocation of the poor villagers to the vicinity of the theaters and the shops. Tall promises have been made to take good care of them. Outraged at the negligent attitude of the civic authorities, government and even social service agencies, the poet addresses them as "*greedy good-doers*" apparently benefactors but actually "*beasts of prey*" who exploit the innocent village folk by giving them a short term sense of security, the villagers are not being helped but harmed.

They pay a heavy price by losing their land. These developers, civic authorities, with a calculative strategy "*soothe*" (silence) and befool the unalloyed heart and minds of these

villagers. By ensuring them a better life and hence good sleep, they actually sleep peacefully themselves and destroy their slumber with anxiety. In the ancient way, people used to work during day and sleep in nights which has been reversed here where they are not able to sleep at night because they haven't worked in the day.

### **Lines 32-43**

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The poet is distressed to note the interminable wait on the part of the shed owners for their prospective buyers, he calls it almost a "childish longing in vain". The shop window is blanketed with an ambience of sadness that surrounds expectancy. It seems these people yearn for the sound of the car brakes near the shack.

One of the "selfish cars" that pass by the shed has perhaps halted to enquire the "farmer's price" while the other just wanted to use the backyard to turn. It's indeed a satire that one of the occupants of the car stops at the shed to get a gallon of gas. It highlights a sense of alienation that exists between the rural and urban life. Unaware of the villagers plights and engrossed with the pleasure of the material world, these people are unable to gauge the glaring difference in city and rural life.

### **Lines 43-52**

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The poet regrets that the yardstick of gain vested in money, isn't found in the country-side at all. Money he feels elevates spirits and the lack of it dampens the villagers' perspective towards life. They tend to express their grievance about a life bereft of money. At this point of time, the poet is overwhelmed with emotions and contemplates their pain at one go by changing their lives. But a later logical thought and a poised state of mind tells him the futility of this rash act. It might compel him to seek purgation of pain from others for his thoughtless decision.

## **Central Idea**

Acclaimed poet, Robert Frost who is regarded for his realistic depiction of rural life using which he touched several difficult social themes of the time.

In this poem, the poet highlights the plight of the deprived villagers who are aching for some money to lead a prosperous life. The poet is also very critical of the way the city folks treat these villagers who are selling their locally produced goods and whizzing past them without a sense of empathy.

## **Theme**

The poem 'A Roadside Stand' is the poet's plea for consideration for the simple people of the countryside whose lives have shown no progress. He expresses his pain at their sadness and sorrow and seeks support and relief for them. He hopes someone would work unselfishly for their rehabilitation and not exploit them. He brings out the wide disparity between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' with pitiless clarity and humanity and seems to suggest that the economic well-being of a country depends on a balanced development of villages and cities.

## **Question Answer**

1. The city folk who drove through the countryside hardly paid any heed to the roadside stand or the people who ran it. If at all they did, it was to complain. Which lines bring this out? What was the complaint about?

### **Answer**

"The polished traffic passed with a mind ahead,

Or if ever aside a moment, then out of sorts

At having the landscape marred with the artless paint

Of signs that with N turned wrong and S turned wrong"

According to the city folk, these stalls with inartistic signboards blemish the scenic beauty of the landscape.

2. What was the plea of the folk who had put up the roadside stand?

**Answer**

The rural folks pleaded pathetically for some customers to stop by and buy some of their goods. City folks used to pass by on this road and hence the rural folk set up the roadside stand to attract their attention and sell their goods.

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5. Which lines tell us about the insufferable pain that the poet feels at the thought of the plight of rural poor?

**Answer**

Filled with empathy, the poet is unable to bear the plight of the unassuming and innocent rural people. The lines below show his insufferable pain:

“Sometimes I feel myself I can hardly bear

The thought of so much childish longing in vain,

The sadness that lurks near the open window there,

That waits all day in almost open prayer”

**6.What Is The Childish Longing That The Poet Refers To In The Poem A Roadside Stand ? Why Is It in vain ?**

Ans: According to the poet the owner of the roadside stand suffer from a childish longing. The shopkeepers wait all day long expecting customers and keep their windows open to attract the customers passing by. But no one turns up to buy anything from the roadside stand thus their childish longing goes in vain.

7.Notice the stanza divisions. Do you find a shift to a new idea in successive stanza?

**Answer:**

The poet has divided the poem into four parts. Every stanza focuses on a different facet of the predicament of the poor villager running a roadside stall. In the first stanza, the poet introduces the character, the reason behind his setting up a roadside stand and his plight. The second stanza focuses on how these poor farmers are exploited by the government and other social agencies.

The poem explains the child-like waiting of these farmers and the attitude of the rich in the third stanza. In the last stanza, it focuses on the efforts required to change their lives.

8. Why do the people who run the roadside stand wait for the squeal of brakes so eagerly? (2003 Delhi)

Answer: The “squealing of brakes” means that a car has stopped at their roadside stand. It raises their hopes that the city-folk have stopped there to buy something from their roadside stand and some city money will come into their hands.

Q9. What was the plea of the folk who had put up the roadside stand?

Answer: The folk who had put up the roadside stand pleaded to the city dwellers to stop and buy their wares so as to enable them to earn some extra money for a decent living. They wanted that the rich people who passed from there in their cars should stop there and buy some goods from them. The money that these folks would earn from the rich people would help them to lead a better life.