

Mending Wall Summary

Writer: Robert Frost | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

summary

Nature and the Broken Wall: The poem begins with the speaker saying that something in nature does not like walls. In winter, the frozen ground swells and pushes the stones away. The sun also loosens them, and wide gaps appear in the wall. The holes are big enough for two people to walk through. The speaker also says that hunters sometimes break the wall. They pull down the stones while chasing rabbits for their barking dogs. But most gaps appear mysteriously, without anyone seeing how they were made.

Repairing the Wall in Spring: Every spring, the speaker and his neighbor meet to repair the wall together. They walk along the wall, keeping it between them. They lift heavy stones and put them back in place. Some stones are flat like bread, some are round like balls. It is hard to balance them. They joke that it feels like they are using magic: "Stay where you are until our backs are turned!" Their hands become rough from work. For the speaker, this feels like a friendly outdoor game.

Questioning the Need for the Wall: The speaker starts to wonder if the wall is really needed. His land has apple trees, and the neighbor's land has pine trees. The apples will not cross the boundary to eat the pine cones. So, he asks his neighbor why they need the wall. The neighbor only replies, "Good fences make good neighbors." The speaker feels playful and wants to make the neighbor think. He wonders why fences make good neighbors. Fences are useful only when there are cows. But here, there are no cows.

The Neighbor's Blind Belief: The speaker believes that before building a wall, one should ask: What am I keeping in, and what am I keeping out? He repeats that nature itself does not like walls and tries to break them. The speaker thinks about saying that "elves" break the wall, but knows it is not true. He wishes his neighbor could think in that way. But the neighbor does not. The speaker sees him carrying stones like a savage man. He seems to live in darkness, not just the woods' darkness, but also the darkness of old traditions. The neighbor never questions his father's belief. He only repeats, "Good fences make good neighbors."