

## Words Themes

Writer: Sylvia Plath | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

### Themes

#### The Power and Limits of Writing

This poem is about how strong and powerful words can be. This poem also shows how a writer cannot fully control her words/writing once they are written.

The poem begins by comparing “Words” to “Axes.” This metaphor shows the power of writing. Just as axes cut down trees so that their wood can be made into something else, the poet can transform raw experience into art by writing. The axe metaphor also implies words’ ability to hurt; words can cut—those who read them and, perhaps, those who write them.

When the axe strikes the wood, sap comes out of it—**“sap wells like tears.”** This shows how writing can help express pain. But once words are written and shared, the writer cannot control them anymore. They go out into the world like wild horses running without riders. The writer is left behind.

In the poem, we see an image of a skull under water, being eaten by plants. This shows the poet’s fear of being forgotten after death. Many years later, the poet sees the words on the road like a horse **“dry”** and **“riderless.”** This means the words are now free from the poet’s control. They are “dry,” meaning they may have lost their connection to the poet's emotions. These are some limitations of words/writing.