Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,
That sends the frozen ground swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean.
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
‘Stay where you are until our backs are turned!’
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows?
But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me~
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
Upon first reading, the poem seems simple enough, as it talks about two farmers who are fixing a wall that separates their two properties. One of the farmers – the poetic voice in this piece – seems to be wondering if they really need a wall at all, since they farm different products. His neighbor’s reply, ‘good fences make good neighbors’ seems to indicate that he’d like the wall to stay put.

The reader gets the impression that the word ‘mending’ in the title is important in the poem. The word suggests something is broken and needs repair. The wall itself would seem the obvious choice; in reading the poem, we see that other things are broken as well. As we know, in poetry, little is as it seems. We have to be on the lookout for hidden meanings.

A reader may also sense a love of nature. There’s talk about the sun, hunters, rabbits and dogs. One may also sense that the neighbors don’t get along ‘good fences make good neighbors’.

Examining the Poet:
• Robert Frost is a very famous American poet whose love of nature and study of rural people’s personalities reflected in his poetry.
• His poetry frequently had settings from rural life, using them to examine complex social and philosophical themes.
• Perhaps his examination of the line ‘good fences make good neighbors’ is examining one of these themes.
• Frost was also well-known for his vivid use of metaphor and simile in creating strong imagery with his works.
• Imagery is just one of components in his poem ‘Mending Wall’.
• It also features an inspiring theme, heavy use of metaphor and good use of repetition.
Examining the Poetic Voice

- The voice in this case seems to come from a rural farmer, one who finds the yearly fence mending ritual odd. Why?
- While participating in the fence-mending, he tries to get to the bottom of the way people behave in civilized society.
- Why might Frost have chosen to explore the question as a farmer?

The farmer’s voice obviously isn’t Robert Frost, who was not a farmer.

- Indeed, the farmers simply represent people with ‘walls’ or distances built between them.
- Is Frost’s choice of farmers a legitimate representation in this case? Does it suit his metaphor well?

This is purely guesswork on the part of the reader, although learning about the poet helps.

- In this case, Frost may have written this piece in response to people’s tendency to hold on to certain social rules, no matter how outdated and unnecessary.
- One such rule could be the ‘good fences make good neighbors’ one.
- He perhaps also had a conflict with someone with whom he had built his own barriers.
When one reads Mending Wall, he/she may get the sense that the neighbors are in conflict with one another:

- The reason for the wall in the first place?
- Conflict over the mending of the wall?
- Conflict over whether they really even need a wall between properties?

When the poem is further analyzed, a critical reader may discover that the conflict really isn’t between the farmers at all, but in people holding on to a past and belief of their forefathers.

- ‘Good fences make good neighbors’
- One farmer doesn’t see the need for a barrier between people; the other farmer does, but can’t explain why.

Remember that tone refers to the speaker’s attitude towards the subject matter of the poem (usually expressed as an adjective).

- In this case, we might say that the speaker’s tone is one of wonder or even bemusement (confused, but curious) at his and his neighbor’s yearly ritual of mending a wall that neither of them really need.
- He notes that they fix it every year, even the sections which don’t seem to need fixing—because that’s the way it was always done.

At first glance, the mood created by the poem is one of sentimentality.

- Through the language and imagery, there is a strong sense that—while one farmer looks ahead—another seems quite happy to live in the past and honor the memory of his own family and its rituals.

There is also a mood of melancholy:

- Initially, the melancholy seems to be for his loyalty to his family (He will not go behind his father’s saying), but also for those who are not capable of making important decisions by themselves.
- Also, readers lament that people build walls between them to keep each other at bay.
Mending Wall by Robert Frost

Looking at Style

We can safely say that Mending Wall is an example of a lyric poem:

Poetry that presents the deep feelings and emotions of the poet as opposed to poetry that tells a story or presents a witty observation.

Sonnets, odes, and elegies are examples of lyric poems.

It might also be viewed as a dramatic monologue in which the speaker addresses an unseen listener.

What do we know?

Poem is unrhymed

It contains no stanzas (verses)

It is written in blank verse, a form of poetry with unrhymed lines in iambic pentameter, a metric scheme with five pairs of syllables per line, each pair containing an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. The first four lines of the poem demonstrate the pattern:

Some THING..|..there IS,..|..that DOES..|..n't LOVE..|..a WALL.
That SENDS..|..the FRO..|..zen GROUND..|..swell UN..|..der IT
And SPILLS..|..the UP ..|..per BOULders IN..|..the SUN.
And MAKES..|..gaps E..|..ven TWO..|..can PASS..|..a BREAST.

Identifying the Type of Poem

Identifying the Poem’s Structure
It is important to read the language of poetry literally and figuratively.

- The poem is written in the everyday language of simple conversation.

- While most of the terms are familiar, there are some interesting arrangements of words:
  - Something there is that doesn't love a wall
  - Frozen ground swell
  - Pass abreast
  - I was like to give offence

In this poem, two lines are repeated frequently:
- Something there is that does not love a wall.
- Good fences make good neighbors.

Frost saw the need for this repetition in emphasizing the opposing viewpoints of the walls (or barriers) that exist between people.

Repetition reflects the metaphor of walls separating people.
Examining Figures of Speech

- Though the language is simple, there are many figures of speech:
  - Mending Wall
    - Metaphor
  - And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
    - Metaphor
  - We have to use a spell on them to make them balance
    - Personification
  - Stay where you are until our backs are turned!
    - Apostrophe
  - Oh, just another kind of outdoor game
    - Metaphor

More Figures of Speech

- He is all pine and I am apple orchard
  - Metaphor
- My apple trees will never get across and eat the cones...
  - Personification
- Spring is the mischief in me...
  - Metaphor
- Before I built a wall I'd ask what I was walling in or walling out
  - Paradox? Also some alliteration (before, built; what, was, walling)

More Figures of Speech

- ...like an old-stone savage armed.
  - Simile
- He moves in darkness
  - Metaphor (if you don’t take ‘darkness’ literally)
- He will not go behind his father’s saying
  - Personification

- Which are the strongest examples? The most effective?
A Dominant Figure of Speech

- Something there is that does not love a wall.
  Isn’t it where there are cows?
  To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
  Where they have left not one stone on a stone.

- This is a common Shakespearean device: inversion (or anastrophe), in what is perhaps the most memorable line in the poem, one would ordinarily write: ‘There is something that doesn’t love a wall’.

Key Images and Patterns of Image

- References to spaces built between people:
  - Wall, gaps, line
  - Of course, the wall is the dominant image in this piece, symbolizing barriers that exist between people.

- Many have to do with a love of nature:
  - Ground-swell, boulders, stone, rabbits, yelping dogs, hill, orchard, cows, etc.

- The entire poem, through its use of figurative language and simple description, creates images in the reader’s mind. The images appeal to the poem’s literal meaning.
  - Throughout the poem, we walk with the farmers, fixing their wall.
The central theme of Mending Wall is whether it is in our best interests to build 'walls' and other types of barriers.

Early in the poem, it seems to suggest that walls stand as obstacles to progress and friendship.

If we tear them down, as the mysterious 'something' does, and you open the way for communication, friendship, and unity.

Yet the neighbor with pine trees insists that walls 'make good neighbors'. He resembles a man who respects the will of his absent father too much to abandon his wishes (represented by his phrase). He’s also an obstructionist who can only recite his father's overused phrase to justify his yearly task of rebuilding the wall.

The poem’s speaker describes him as a creature of primitive darkness:

I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.

Also, the poem seems to indicate that walls may be necessary after all - at least in some cases - as suggested in the lines:

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.

This sentence indicates that the speaker would approve of a wall with an obvious purpose, such as banks, zoos, museums, and nuclear power plants, for example, all require walls, which would be good things to make good neighbors.
Ironically, in the interest of mutual courtesy and civility, the speaker of the poem each spring helps to reconstruct a wall he believes is unnecessary.

He doesn’t want a wall of disagreement to stand between him and his neighbor.

In other words, he sees the unnecessary wall as necessary.

Frost’s poem is an invitation to the reader to participate in life more fully and to avoid building the barriers that stand in the way of friendship. ‘Mending Wall’ shows how these barriers stand in the way of true friendships, also, it shows how an unwillingness to change can lead to unfulfilled social opportunities. It suggests that we can look beyond personal fears and self-imposed limitations in order to achieve greater knowledge and more intense life experiences.

In Frost’s view, those people who break down walls are the ones who stand to experience life at a deeper, more significant level. ‘Mending Wall’ is a warning of sorts to those individuals who are afraid to accept friendship and live a more meaningful life.
The message of Frost’s ‘Mending Wall’ is timeless. While farmers spend little time repairing stone walls in the literal sense, we are all ‘farmers’ of our own lives and the fewer ‘walls’ we build between ourselves and other people, the greater the chance we will experience life on a fuller, more satisfying level. Also, living our lives in someone else’s image can be dangerous and unrewarding. This unwillingness to challenge the past and live our lives on our own terms can be unfulfilling. Not only that, it does very little to enrich the brief time we were meant to spend on this earth.