

## Rochester College Writing Standards

### GRAMMAR and SYNTAX

1. Comma splices
2. Run-On and Fused sentences
3. Fragments
4. Noun/Pronoun agreement (do not mix singular and plural)
5. Subject/Verb agreement
6. Consistent tense
7. Misplaced modifiers
8. Parallel structure

### STYLE

1. No second person (“you” and “your” and “understood you”)
2. “it” and “there” and other meaningless words
3. Wordiness
4. Contractions

### PUNCTUATION

1. Colon use
2. Colons to introduce quotes
3. Semicolon use
4. Apostrophes
5. Titles
6. Commas

### CONTENT

1. Topic statement in the introduction
2. Thesis statement in the introduction
3. Include generalizations and details
4. Adequate support
5. Citing sources (APA and MLA style)
6. Integrate quotes properly

### ORGANIZATION

1. Topic sentence for each body paragraph
2. Transition words
3. Conclusion as a separate paragraph

STANDARD	EXPLANATION	INCORRECT	CORRECT
<b>GRAMMAR AND SYNTAX</b>			
<p>1. <b>Comma Splices</b></p>	<p>A. Do not use a comma instead of a full stop between two complete sentences. “Full stops” are question marks, exclamation points, periods, semicolons, and colons.</p> <p>Comma splices can be corrected by using a full stop OR by adding a coordinating conjunction (and, or, nor, for, but, yet, so) WITH the comma.</p>	<p>A. Jim threw the pass, Bob caught it.</p>	<p>A. Jim threw the pass, and Bob caught it.</p> <p>Jim threw the pass; Bob caught it.</p>
<p>2. <b>Run-on Sentences</b></p> <p><b>Fused Sentences</b></p>	<p>A. A run-on is a sentence that goes on too long.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Samuel Clemens, who is best known as Mark Twain, created his pen name during his days as a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi River, but few people know that this name came from the custom of measuring the depth of the water by throwing a weighted rope off the back of the boat and calling out “Mark,” meaning the water mark on the rope, followed by the depth, such as “nine feet” or “ten feet,” but the “mark” the riverboat pilot liked to hear most was “twain,” meaning two, or a safe depth of two fathoms which is twelve feet.</p> <p>B. Fused sentences are two complete sentences joined together without punctuation. Some professors do not use the term “fused sentence” and instead call this mistake a “run-on.”</p>	<p>A. We are sick we have the flu.</p> <p>The test was easy I got an A.</p>	<p>A. We are sick; we have the flu.</p> <p>The test was easy, so I got an A.</p>
<p>3. <b>Fragments</b></p>	<p>Fragments are incomplete sentences.</p>	<p>Although he said he would be on time. He was late.</p>	<p>Although he said he would be on time, he was late.</p>

STANDARD	EXPLANATION	INCORRECT	CORRECT
4. <b>Nouns and Pronouns Should “Agree” in Number.</b>	<p>Plural nouns require plural pronouns, and singular nouns require singular pronouns.</p> <p><b>Using plural nouns is often helpful</b> because the pronoun “they” is not gender specific. For example, “A good student refers often to his or her syllabi” could be streamlined into “Good students refer often to their syllabi.”</p>	<p>A <u>student</u> who wants to do well must edit <u>their</u> paper carefully.</p>	<p><b>Students</b> who want to do well must edit <u>their</u> papers carefully</p> <p><b>All</b> the actors brought <u>their pets</u> to the performance. (3 plural words)</p> <p><b>One</b> of the girls left <u>her purse</u>. (3 singular words that agree.)</p> <p>With such stress, <u>a</u> twelve-year-old would collapse before <u>he or she</u> could get help.</p>
5. <b>Subjects and Verbs Should “Agree” in Number</b>	<p>Plural subjects need plural verbs, and singular subjects need singular verbs. When in doubt about whether a subject is singular or plural, substitute the noun with pronouns (“it” or “they”) to help you determine the correct verb.</p>	<p>Diet and exercise <u>enhances</u> health.</p> <p><i>Steel Magnolias</i> <u>are</u> a great movie.</p>	<p>Diet and exercise <u>enhance</u> health. (<b>They</b> enhance health.)</p> <p><i>Steel Magnolias</i> <u>is</u> a great movie. (<b>It</b> is a great movie.)</p>
6. <b>Consistent Tense</b>	<p>Sometimes logic demands a change of tense</p> <p>A. Use present tense when writing about literature</p> <p>B. Try to avoid future tense</p> <p>C. Never use future tense for a statement of fact</p> <p>D. Always use <b>past tense</b> when the subject of the sentence is no longer living.</p>	<p>A. Huck Finn and Jim drifted aimlessly on their raft.</p> <p>B. Experienced readers will quickly recognize the themes of this novel.</p> <p>C. Tickets will cost ten dollars.</p> <p>D. George Washington is the first president of our nation.</p>	<p>A. Huck Finn and Jim drift aimlessly on their raft.</p> <p>B. Experienced readers quickly recognize the themes of this novel.</p> <p>C. Tickets cost ten dollars.</p> <p>D. George Washington was the first president of our nation.</p>
7. <b>Misplaced Modifiers</b>	<p>A modifier describes the word or phrase that immediately follows it, so make sure your modifiers are placed correctly.</p>	<p>I almost read the entire book in one night.</p> <p>Trying to swat a fly on the windshield,</p>	<p>I read almost the entire book in one night.</p> <p>While trying to swat a fly on the</p>

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8. <b>Parallel Structure</b>	Parallel structure means to use similar grammatical style throughout a sentence, making the parts of the sentence “line up” as if they are parallel lines.	the car spun out of control.  In order to make money, Student Government held a bake sale and a track meet, and they sold t-shirts.	windshield, the driver lost control.  In order to raise money, Student Government held a bake sale, hosted the track meet, and sold Homecoming t-shirts.  <b>(Each part begins with a verb in the past tense followed by a noun.)</b>
<b>STYLE</b>			
1. <b>Use of Second Person</b>	A. Second person is “you” or “understood you.” (“You can imagine the result.” Or “Imagine the results.”)  B. However, do not replace “you” with the formal and stuffy “one.” Instead, find an appropriate noun, such as “the reader” or “many students.” <b>(Note: Using “I” in academic writing is usually acceptable. Ask your professors their preference.)</b>	A. You will quickly recognize the themes of <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> .  B. One will quickly recognize the themes of <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> .	A. Astute readers quickly recognize the themes of <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> .  B. Being an astute reader, I quickly realized the themes of <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> .
2. <b>Meaningless Words</b>	Meaningless words are those such as such as “ <b>There</b> is/are” and “ <b>it</b> ” unless “it” has an antecedent, a noun that directly connects to “it.”	A. There are ten people in the van.  B. It has been many years since I saw Bob.	A. Ten people are in the van.  B. I have not seen Bob in years.
3. <b>Wordiness</b>	Sentences should be lean and direct.	The majority of homework is supposed to be designed for the purpose of reinforcing ideas presented in class.	Homework is designed to reinforce ideas presented in class.
4. <b>Contractions</b>	Avoid contractions in academic writing.	The author doesn’t make his intention clear.	The author does not make his intention clear.

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<b>PUNCTUATION</b>			
<p>1. <b>Use of Colons</b></p>	<p>A. A colon, like a period, is a “full stop,” so a colon <b>MUST</b> be preceded by a complete sentence, just like a period must be preceded by a complete sentence.</p> <p>B. What comes <b>after</b> a colon can be a word, a phrase, a list, a quote, or even a complete sentence <b>if</b> the second sentence is an explanation for the first. Do not capitalize the first word following the colon. It is optional whether to capitalize the first word in a <b>complete sentence</b> following a colon.</p> <p>NOTE: using a dramatic pause is the result of a colon, which is not always a desirable effect.</p>	<p>A. This week the library is open on: Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday.</p> <p>My best subjects are: English, Speech, and Theatre.</p>	<p>A. This week the library is open on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday.</p> <p>My best subjects are English, Speech, and Theatre.</p> <p>B. Three freshmen cannot play in Friday’s game: they have been suspended.</p> <p>She left home one only one thought in mind: to get a job.</p> <p>Solving this problem depends on a single element: logic.</p> <p>My father has three demands: that I get good grades, that I work on weekends, and that I arrive home before midnight each night.</p>
<p>2. <b>Colons to Introduce Quotes</b></p>	<p>Use a colon when the quote and its introduction are both complete sentences. Always capitalize the first word in the quote which follows the colon.</p>	<p>JFK ended his inaugural address with a stirring admonition, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”</p> <p><b>(This is a comma splice because the introduction and quote are both complete sentences.)</b></p>	<p>JFK concluded his inaugural address with a stirring admonition: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”</p>

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<p>3. <b>Use of Semicolons</b></p>	<p>A. A semicolon, like a period, is a full stop. <b>Each side of a semicolon must be a complete sentence.</b></p> <p>B. The semicolon also is used between two complete sentences that have a conjunctive adverb between them as a transition word. Some conjunctive adverbs are <i>therefore, however, consequently, nevertheless, otherwise, thus, instead, furthermore, still, for example, hence, indeed, then, similarly, moreover</i>, etc.</p> <p>C. The word <i>although</i> is NOT a conjunctive adverb. It always begins a dependent (incomplete) clause.</p> <p>D. A semicolon is also used to <b>group items together in a series</b>, the only <b>exception</b> to the rule that each side of a semicolon must be a complete sentence.</p>	<p>A. Hawthorne wrote <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>; his masterwork.</p> <p>B. I suggested a theme for the party, however, no one else liked it. (This is a comma splice!)</p> <p>C. The Pilgrims’ major reason for immigration was religion; although, some also hoped to escape poverty. <b>(A fragment follows this semicolon. Remember that “although” ALWAYS begins dependent clauses and can NEVER be immediately followed by a comma. See the correct use in the right column.)</b></p>	<p>A. Hawthorne wrote <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>; it is considered his masterwork.</p> <p>B. I suggested a theme for the party; however, no one else liked it.</p> <p>C. The Pilgrims’ major reason for immigration was religion; however, some also hoped to escape poverty.</p> <p>Although some also hoped to escape poverty, the Pilgrims’ major reason for immigration was religion.</p> <p>D. We plan to travel to Bangkok, Thailand; Beijing, China; and Melbourne, Australia.</p> <p>The play will be presented at 7:30 on Thursday, May 4; 8:00 on Friday, May 5; 8:00 on Saturday, May 6; and 2:00 on Sunday, May 7.</p>

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4. <b>Apostrophes</b>	<p>A. Possessive <b>pronouns</b> do NOT have apostrophes</p> <p>B. Possessive <b>nouns</b> have apostrophes</p> <p>C. <b>Singular nouns</b> are made possessive by adding <b>apostrophe + s</b> (no matter what the word ends with!)</p> <p>D. <b>Plural nouns that end in “s”</b> are made possessive by adding an apostrophe only</p> <p>E. Plural nouns that do not end in “s” are made possessive by adding apostrophe + s (just like singular nouns)</p> <p>F. Verbs never require an apostrophe.</p> <p>G. Never use an apostrophe to make a noun plural.</p> <p>H. <b>Numbers and letters</b> are made plural by using an apostrophe.</p> <p>I. When writing <b>years</b>, an apostrophe is NOT to be used.</p>	<p>F. He eat’s well.</p> <p>G. Coke’s are free in the cafeteria today.</p>	<p>A. His, hers, yours, ours, theirs, its</p> <p>B. The girl’s book The dog’s collar</p> <p>C. Joe’s car Jess’s car</p> <p>D. Three players’ uniforms were found in the gym. (<i>Players’</i> is plural and possessive)</p> <p>E. The children’s singing was wonderful.  The oxen’s yoke was heavy.</p> <p>F. He eats well.</p> <p>G. Cokes are free in the cafeteria today.</p> <p>H. Her 7’s look like 1’s. I got all B’s on my report card.</p> <p>I. Fashion was cool in the 1980s.</p>
5. <b>Titles</b>	<p>A. Titles of long published works (books, newspapers, journals, periodicals, and plays) are <i>italicized</i>.</p> <p>B. Titles of short published works (poems, articles, chapter titles, short stories, and essays) are put in quote marks.</p> <p>C. Titles of YOUR works (since they are not published) do NOT receive any decoration or punctuation.</p>		<p><i>The New York Times</i> <i>The Crucible</i></p> <p>“The Raven” “A Rose for Emily”</p> <p>Nixon: The Watergate Mastermind</p>

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<p>6. <b>Commas</b></p>	<p>Although grammar books list thirty or more “comma rules,” these are most significant:</p> <p>A. A comma must be used with the coordinating conjunction in a <b>compound sentence</b>. The seven coordinating conjunctions are: <i>and, or, for, nor, but, yet, so</i></p> <p>B. Do NOT use a comma with compound subjects, verbs, objects, etc.</p> <p>C. Use a comma after an introductory word, phrase, or clause to mark the end of the introduction and the start of the main part of the sentence.</p> <p>D. Use a comma with the coordinating conjunction in a series. A <b>series</b> is THREE or more items. (This comma was once optional, but is now required.)</p>		<p>A. I read the story, but I didn’t understand it.</p> <p>We can write a paper about a play, or we can attend the play.</p> <p>B. The mother and her daughter both appear confused.</p> <p>The officer will give us a fine or some other form of penalty.</p> <p>C. As I rounded the corner, I lost control of the car. Even though we lost the game, we were pleased with ourselves.</p> <p>Yes, the exam is on Friday.</p> <p>David, will you shut the door?</p> <p>Indeed, the resolution of the novel was indeterminate.</p> <p>D. The play will be presented on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.</p> <p>The school will send four representatives: Mr. Smith, Ms. Jones, Dr. Ajax, and Mrs. Reed.</p>



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	<p>E. Use a comma to set off unnecessary, “tagged on” words at the end of a sentence.</p> <p>F. Use two commas around interrupting material that is not necessary in the middle of the sentence.</p>		<p>E. The class is very interesting, isn’t it?</p> <p>Will the antagonist die, also?</p> <p>Please see me after class, Ellen.</p> <p>F. The end of the play, of course, is the most intense.</p> <p>If you want to succeed, John, you must study.</p> <p>Mrs. Jones, along with Mr. Smith, is speaking at the seminar.</p>
<b>CONTENT</b>			
<p><b>1. State the topic of your paper clearly.</b></p>	<p>Do not rely on the title of the paper to convey the topic. The topic should be stated in a clear but interesting and mature manner.</p>	<p>The topic of this paper is the poem “Birches” by Robert Frost. <b>(Uninteresting and immature.)</b></p>	<p>Like much of his poetry, Robert Frost’s “Birches” is a nature poem.</p>
<p><b>2. State your thesis clearly.</b></p>	<p>A thesis is a statement of opinion (usually appearing at the end of the introduction) that controls the entire paper. A thesis can also be a question, and answering that question fully guides the rest of the paper. A thesis should not be written as a statement of intent.</p>	<p>A. This paper will explain that “Birches” represents the struggles of youth. (This is a statement of intent, not an opinion statement.)</p> <p>I believe that “Birches” represents the joys and heartaches of adolescence, and this paper will prove my opinion.</p> <p><b>(Never refer to the paper itself; also, “I” is generally unneeded.)</b></p>	<p>A. Although “Birches” is a nature poem written in Frost’s typical style, it is more specifically an investigation of the joys and struggles of adolescence as revealed by the structure, diction, and symbolism of the poem.</p> <p><b>(This thesis expresses an opinion, and it lays out a three-point “road map” of where the paper is going. Including such specifics helps the reader follow the paper’s argument.)</b></p>

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<p><b>3. Use a combination of generalizations and specific details as supportive evidence in every paragraph.</b></p>	<p>Adding details (quotes, examples, specific illustrations, statistics, etc.) support your generalizations by providing evidence.</p>	<p>The first stanza of “Birches” describes a young boy who climbs and swings on the birch trees in a way that makes the act appear heroic.</p>	<p>In the first stanza of “Birches,” the speaker describes a young boy who climbs and swings on the birch trees growing on his father’s farm. The diction of the poem, however, elevates this boyish act to heroic proportions. The boy “<i>subdued</i> his father’s trees” (line 29) by “riding them down over and over again” (line 31) until “not one was left/ For <i>him to conquer</i>” (lines 32-33; italics are added for emphasis). Furthermore, as he performs these feats, “he always kept his poise” (line 36). Clearly, in the boy’s mind he has mastered his father’s trees, and his success is important, not trivial.</p>
<p><b>4. Provide sufficient specific examples. Generally provide a minimum of two specifics to support every generalization.</b></p>	<p>Generalizations are often an effective opening for a body paragraph, but they should always be followed by examples. One example is usually viewed as weak. Two examples are sometimes adequate but, at times, three or more are more effective and convincing.</p>	<p>One literary technique frequently found in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novels and short stories is symbolism. For example, the character’s names in <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> are symbolic.</p>	<p>One literary technique frequently found in Hawthorne's novels and short stories is symbolism. The characters' names in <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> are highly symbolic: Hester's daughter, Pearl, is reminiscent of the biblical parable of the pearl of great price; Dimmesdale, the minister, is so overshadowed by his sin that he lives in spiritual darkness; and Hester's former husband, Chillingworth, has become a cold human being in his pursuit of revenge. Other symbolism can be found in various objects. In "The Minister's Black Veil," the minister's choice to wear a veil over his face symbolizes the barriers that people construct that prevent necessary human interaction.</p>

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<p><b>5. Cite your source material whether the information is quoted or paraphrased.</b></p>	<p>To cite a source means to give credit to the original author. (If the author's name is not given, then cite the title of the source.)</p>	<p>While many readers assume that Dylan Thomas's poem "Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night" is addressed to his father, other critics suggest that Thomas was actually writing about himself. (Many students erroneously assume that no citation is needed since nothing has been quoted; however, not citing a paraphrased source is dishonest and/or careless research.)</p>	<p>(See examples below)</p>
<p><b>Correct APA Style</b></p>	<p>(1) Literary critic Harold Bloom suggests that "Do Not Go Gentle" could be the poet's own epitaph (1997, p. 129).</p> <p>(2) Although most critics believe that Dylan Thomas was writing about his father in "Do Not Go Gentle," another interpretation is that Thomas wrote the poem about himself and his imminent death (Bloom, 1997, p. 129).</p>		
<p><b>Correct MLA Style</b></p>	<p>(1) Harold Bloom suggests that "Do Not Go Gentle" could be the poet's own epitaph (129).</p> <p>(2) (Although most critics believe that Thomas was writing about his father in "Do Not Go Gentle," another interpretation is that Thomas was writing about himself (Bloom 129).</p> <p>NOTE 1: MLA does not use a "p." or a comma or the year.</p> <p>NOTE 2: The author's name should not appear twice in the same sentence, which explains why the last name is dropped from the parentheses in the first example in both APA and MLA style.</p>		

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<p><b>6. Integrate quotations properly.</b></p>	<p>Explanations that apply to both APA and MLA:</p> <p>(1) Never include an unattributed quote. In other words, all quotes need an introduction that attributes the words to their speaker.</p> <p>(2) Short quotes (4 lines or fewer) are integrated into the structure of the paragraph. They are not “set off.”</p> <p>(3) Long quotes (more than 4 lines) are “set off” in a block, which indented 10 spaces from the left margin. Keep the normal right hand margin, and keep the double spacing. However, do NOT use quotation marks. The setting off indicates that the material is a quote.</p> <p>(4) After every quote, provide your own commentary/discussion in order to clarify the relationship between the quote and the point you are making. Do not expect the quote to make your point for you. RC’s Code of Academic Integrity states that students must demonstrate their understanding of the material that is being presented, and providing commentary after each quote is one way to fulfill this requirement.</p> <p>(5) Use an ellipsis (3 spaced periods) to indicate words that you have omitted, and place squared brackets around the ellipsis to indicate that you, not the original text, omitted the words.</p> <p>(6) Use brackets to make minor changes in a quotation in order for it to fit smoothly and grammatically into your sentence.</p> <p>(7) Use single quotation marks for a quote that appears inside a quote.</p>	<p>A. All Americans need to remember these words: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.</p> <p>B. “This was the second time this morning that her uncle’s wrath had descended on her head. . . What an uproar she had caused.”</p> <p>C. As the daughter watches her father’s changes, she realizes that “what I love is the way/ the reserve has slipped from his feelings” (lines 11-12).</p> <p>D. Thomas’s biographer Michael Murphy believes that the poem argues that “no one, particularly Thomas’s father, should “go gentle into that good night””(55).</p>	<p>A. In his inaugural address, President John F. Kennedy challenged all Americans with this stirring admonition: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”</p> <p>B. Rachel’s situation quickly makes her a sympathetic character: “This was the second time this morning that her uncle’s wrath had wrath had descended on her head. [. . . ] What an uproar she had caused.”</p> <p><b>NOTE: Often a period is required to end a sentence. Then the ellipsis is bracketed.</b></p> <p>C. As the daughter watches her father’s changes, she realizes that “what [she] love[s] is the way/ the reserve has slipped from his feelings” (lines 11-12).</p> <p>Use brackets to make minor changes in the text to make a quotation fit smoothly into your sentence.</p> <p>D. Thomas’s biographer Michael Murphy believes that the poem argues that “no one, particularly Thomas’s father, should ‘go gentle into that good night’” (55).</p>

STANDARD	EXPLANATION	INCORRECT	CORRECT
<b>ORGANIZATION</b>			
<p><b>1. Every paragraph of the body of the paper must have a topic sentence.</b></p>	<p>The topic sentence is the first sentence of each paragraph, and it fulfills two functions:</p> <p>(1) It clearly relates the new paragraph to the thesis, and</p> <p>(2) It serves as a mini-introduction to the new paragraph.</p>	<p>“Birches,” although a poem is told like a story. For this reason it is classified as a narrative poem.</p>	<p>One major device employed by Frost to explore the theme of adolescence in “Birches” is the structure of the poem. While nature poems are generally crafted around a descriptive structure, this poem follows the narrative structure typical of fiction.</p> <p>(This topic sentence directly relates to the thesis above and clearly introduces the topic of the new body paragraph.)</p>
<p><b>2. Use clear transition words between sentences and between paragraphs.</b></p>	<p>Transition words (next, then, later, first, second, third, finally, consequently, similarly, for example, thus, indeed, instead, however, therefore, in addition, in contrast, nevertheless, furthermore, etc.) show how new material relates to the previous material. Transition words keep the reader on track with the paper’s ideas and movement.</p>	<p>Frost develops his theme about adolescence through the structure of the poem. The symbols explain the in struggles of young people, particularly those living in isolation on a farm</p>	<p>As described above, Frost develops his theme about adolescence through the structure of the poem. Similarly, the symbols explain the inner struggles of young people, particularly those living in isolation on a farm.</p>
<p><b>3. End the paper with a separate paragraph that serves as a conclusion.</b></p>	<p>Tacking a summary sentence onto the final body paragraph is rarely an effective conclusion. A separate concluding paragraph generally serves three purposes:</p> <p>(1) It restates the thesis in a fresh way in order to provide unity: the paper ends more or less in the same way it began.</p> <p>(2) It briefly reviews the major points of the paper.</p> <p>(3) It ends with a final strong sentence that reflects the content of the entire paper, not simply one aspect.</p>	<p>The poem “Birches,” although a nature poem, describes the struggles of adolescence.</p>	<p>While many appreciate Frost’s poetry because of its vivid descriptions of nature, “Birches” reveals that Frost could have other purposes in writing nature poems. Through his use of structure, diction, and symbolism, Frost illustrates the lonely world of a boy living on his father’s farm, far from town or neighbors. In this vacuum, the boy engages in the one-person sport of swinging on birch trees, which the diction of the poem reveals to be (in the mind of the boy) a heroic contest of daring and strength. “Birches” is much more than a nature poem; it is also an insightful analysis of the struggles of adolescence.</p>

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