



## Lesson: “A Brook in the City”

(To follow Amplify CKLA Grade 4, Unit 3, Lesson 11)

### At a Glance

In this lesson, students examine Robert Frost’s poem “A Brook in the City” as an illustration of how industrialization changed New Hampshire’s landscape in the early 20th century. In particular, students will focus on how Frost uses the device of personification to communicate the impact of that change. One of the most celebrated poets in American history, Robert Frost spent much of his career living and working in New Hampshire. His collection *New Hampshire* (in which “A Brook in the City” first appeared) won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923.

### Primary Focus Objectives

- Students will explain how industrialization and urbanization changed New Hampshire’s landscape.
- Students will identify and make use of personification in reading and writing poetry.

### Formative Assessment

- Respond to a content-focused prompt (Mason’s Challenge)
- Write a poem that uses the device of personification
- Add to vocabulary chart

### Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.4.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

### Materials

Focus Text Facts: Robert Frost

Explainer Video: [“Mason Asks: What Were the Amoskeag Mills?”](#)

Focus Text: “A Brook in the City”

Vocabulary Card: Personification

### Time Needed

One to two 30-40 minute class sessions

### Learning Activity

1. **Meet the poet.** Project or provide students with copies of “Focus Text Facts: Robert Frost” and read the content together. (5 minutes)
2. **Watch a video.** This brief explainer video shows how industrialization changed the landscape of the city we know today as Manchester. (5 minutes)
3. **Read and listen to the poem.** Provide students with a copy of “A Brook in the City.” Read the poem aloud to students as they read along and then give them time to read it again independently. Add words to vocabulary charts. (10 minutes)



4. **Answer Mason's Challenge.** Direct students to read Mason's Challenge on "Focus Text Facts: Robert Frost" and write their responses on the poem page. Discuss responses as a whole group. *(10 minutes)*
5. **Define "personification."** Ask students if they noticed anything in particular about how Frost writes about the brook. Discuss the language he uses to make the brook an active character in the poem and highlight examples. Explain to students that this technique or literary device is called personification. *(5 minutes)*
6. **Write a poem.** Project the Vocabulary Card and review the definition. Ask students to think about an inanimate object that they see every day. Challenge them to write a short poem that lets that inanimate object become a main character. Use the prompts on the Vocabulary Card to help students plan their poem. *(15 minutes)*



## Educator Rationale and Answer Guide

### Connection to Amplify

This lesson uses material from Moose on the Loose, [Lesson 15.4, "New Hampshire Through the Writer's Eye"](#) to extend learning objectives achieved in Amplify CKLA, Grade 4, Unit 3 Lesson 11: "Fog." This lesson applies student understanding of extended metaphor, gained in Lesson 11, to a poem by New Hampshire's most famous poet: Robert Frost. This lesson will reinforce student understanding of a specific literary device while introducing them to the social studies topics of industrialization and urbanization in New Hampshire in the early 20th century.

### Focus Text Facts: Robert Frost

This one-page guide provides basic biographical information about Robert Frost and an explanation of the terms *industrialization* and *urbanization*. While reading together, ensure that students use the map to locate Frost's farms in relation to the city of Manchester.

### "Mason Asks: What Were the Amoskeag Mills"

Before viewing this explainer video, tell students that it will help them understand how the Industrial Revolution impacted a particular New Hampshire location. The Amoskeag Manufacturing Company is an excellent example of industrialization leading to urbanization. After watching, ensure that students observed:

- the use of machines to do more work, faster than it had been done before
- the change in the landscape and how a city was built over farmland as the Amoskeag Company grew

### Read and listen to the poem

Read the poem aloud to students while they read along. Discuss what they understand about the setting of the poem, who the speaker could be, and what the speaker is thinking about. Ask students to read the poem independently. It may be helpful, individually or as a group, to draw a picture of the images created in this poem: a farmhouse now surrounded by lots of other buildings in a growing city, with a brook flowing deep underground. Students should understand that the brook is now in a sewer because the city has been built over it. It no longer runs freely because people covered the land with streets and buildings.

### Answer Mason's Challenge

In this poem, there are five examples of urbanization impacting the landscape:

- "The farmhouse lingers, though averse [not quite in line with] to square/ with the new city street it has to wear/ a number in."
- "The meadow grass could be cemented down/from growing under pavements of a town"
- "The apple trees be sent to hearth-stone flame" [cut down, burned in home fires]
- "The brook was thrown/deep in a sewer dungeon under stone"
- "This new-built city"

This is a good place to pause if dividing the lesson across two class sessions.

### Define "personification"

Remind students of how Carl Sandburg compared the fog to a cat, creeping on its silent paws. Frost uses a range of language to make the brook seem alive, like a person. He gives the brook actions and feelings a person might have: "held the house as in an elbow-crook"; "knew its strength and impulse"; "in fetid [unpleasant, damp, dirty] darkness still to live and run"; "except forget to go in fear".



## ROBERT FROST

### A Poet Who Observed a Beautiful and Changing New Hampshire Landscape



Left: A portrait of Frost from 1910. Credit: New Hampshire Historical Society  
Right: Frost and his family on their farm in Franconia, NH in 1915. Photo Credit: *New York Times*



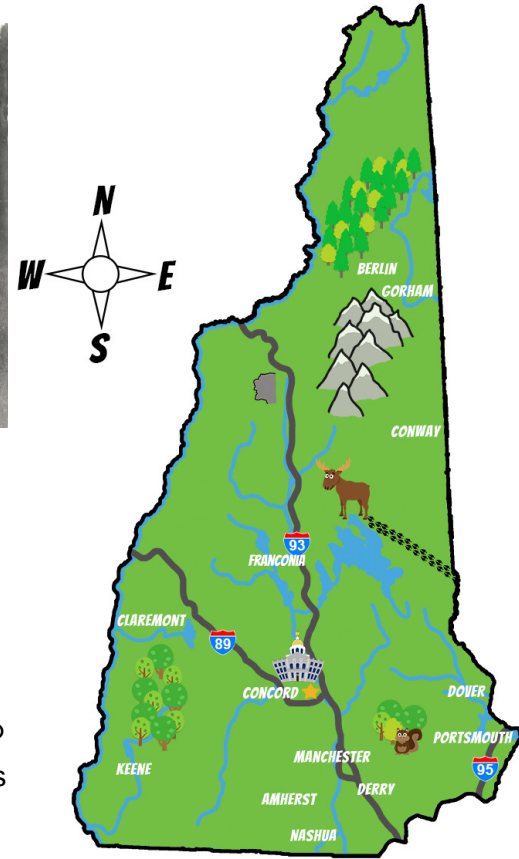
**Robert Frost** was a very famous poet who lived in New Hampshire. Frost was born in California in 1874, but he grew up in Massachusetts. Later, he moved to New Hampshire and lived there for part of his life.

Frost was also a teacher. He taught English at Pinkerton Academy and Plymouth State University in New Hampshire. Frost lived on two farms in New Hampshire. One farm was in Derry, and the other was in Franconia.

Many of Robert Frost's poems talk about the beauty of New Hampshire and what life was like on a farm. In 1923, he won an important award called the Pulitzer Prize for a book of poems titled *New Hampshire*. One of the poems in this book is called "A Brook in the City."



Find Frost: Can You locate Derry and Franconia on this map?



"A Brook in the City" was written about 100 years ago, around 1920. During this time, small towns and rural areas in New Hampshire were changing. Many people moved to cities (**urbanization**) where they worked in factories (**industrialization**). Fewer people lived on farms or small towns. The way the land looked changed a lot, too! Streets, housing, and factories were built over former farmland.



### MASON'S CHALLENGE

After you read "A Brook in the City," go back to the poem and find **five** ways that **urbanization** and **industrialization** have changed the land. Underline these examples.



## **“A Brook in the City” by Robert Frost**

The farmhouse lingers, though averse to square  
    With the new city street it has to wear  
    A number in. But what about the brook  
    That held the house as in an elbow-crook?  
I ask as one who knew the brook, its strength  
    And impulse, having dipped a finger length  
    And made it leap my knuckle, having tossed  
A flower to try its currents where they crossed.  
    The meadow grass could be cemented down  
    From growing under pavements of a town;  
The apple trees be sent to hearth-stone flame.  
    Is water wood to serve a brook the same?  
    How else dispose of an immortal force  
    No longer needed? Staunch it at its source  
With cinder loads dumped down? The brook was thrown  
    Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone  
    In fetid darkness still to live and run—  
    And all for nothing it had ever done  
    Except forget to go in fear perhaps.  
No one would know except for ancient maps  
    That such a brook ran water. But I wonder  
    If from its being kept forever under,  
The thoughts may not have risen that so keep  
    This new-built city from both work and sleep.



# ***PERSONIFICATION***

Part of speech: noun

**Definition:** A literary technique that gives non-human things human traits or abilities.

**Variation:** personify (verb)

**How to use it:** The **leaves danced** through the air as they fell from the branches **and joined their friends** on the grass below.