

The Cold Within

By James Patrick Kinney

Six humans trapped by happenstance
In bleak and bitter cold
Each one possessed a stick of wood,
Or so the story's told.

Their dying fire in need of logs,
The first man held his back
For of the faces round the fire
He noticed one was black.

The next man looking 'cross the way
Saw one not of his church.
And couldn't bring himself to give
The fire his stick of birch.

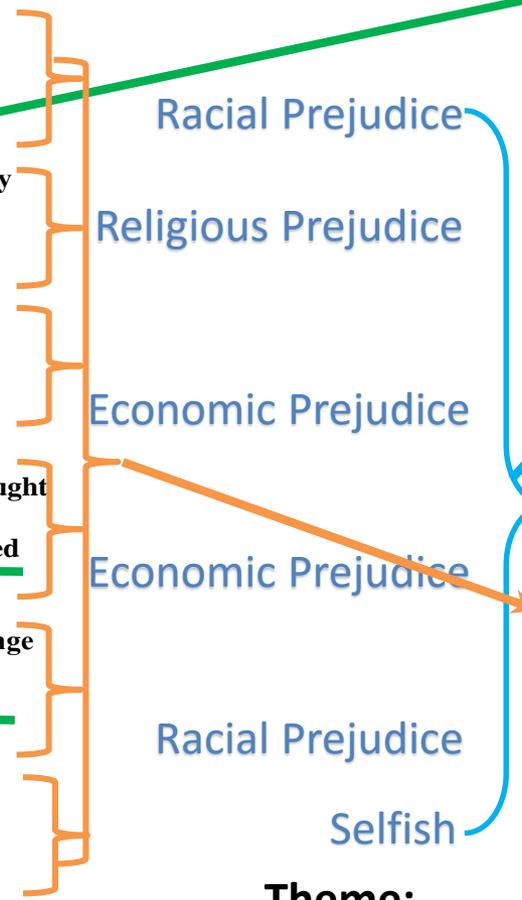
The third one sat in tattered clothes
He gave his coat a hitch.
Why should his log be put to use
To warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back and thought
Of the wealth he had in store
And how to keep what he had earned
From the lazy, shiftless poor.

The black man's face bespoke revenge
As the fire passed from his sight
For all he saw in his stick of wood
Was a chance to spite the white.

The last man of this forlorn group
Did naught except for gain.
Giving only to those who gave
Was how he played the game.

Their logs held tight in death's still hands
Was proof of human sin.
They didn't die from the cold without
They died from the cold within.



Words or Phrases:

The writer uses words like "bleak and bitter cold," "dying," "forlorn," and death to set up a depressing and desperate mood.

Tone or Language:

The overall tone of the text is judgmental. I know this because all of the characters judge someone else in the group that is different from themselves and make a choice based on that decision. The author judges all of them as well and sentences them all to death for the sin they have committed.

Craft Elements:

The author uses symbolism to help the reader understand the consequences of holding back their "logs." The logs represent their prejudices. And because they can't give them up to keep the fire going, they all die.

Structure:

The author organizes the text into eight four-line stanzas. Each of the six middle stanzas present a man who has a different prejudice against someone else around the fire. They all make the same decision and all pay the same price for that decision as seen in the last stanza.

Theme:

This poem is about the consequences of letting your prejudices control your decisions. I know this because in the end, all of the men die because they could not let go of their prejudices. They could have saved themselves by burning them, just as we can save ourselves by burning our own.