

The Journey
by Mary Oliver

Speaker + Audience:

The speaker in the poem uses 2nd person point of view ("you") to address the reader directly; the constant repetition makes it feel as if it's a private talk between the speaker and each individual reader

One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began, though the voices around you kept shouting their bad advice-- though the whole house began to tremble and you felt the old tug at your ankles. "Mend my life!" each voice cried. But you didn't stop. You knew what you had to do, though the wind pried with its stiff fingers at the very foundations, though their melancholy was terrible. It was already late enough, and a wild night, and the road full of fallen branches and stones. But little by little, as you left their voices behind, the stars began to burn through the sheets of clouds, and there was a new voice which you slowly recognized as your own, that kept you company as you strode deeper and deeper into the world, determined to do the only thing you could do-- determined to save the only life you could save.

Occasion: the speaker may have been prompted by an actual walk down a road during a storm and used that experience to create a metaphor for a difficult journey, one with distractions and obstacles

Purpose: the speaker seems to be saying that the hardest journey of all may be to listen to your own inner voice, especially when there is a "storm" of other voices advising you otherwise

Tone: I would characterize the tone as: strident, confident, determined, almost conspiratorial; the speaker wants me to listen carefully to the message before I set out on my own journey... which will be different than hers, of course.

Subject: It's clear the poet feels that I need to pay attention to my own journey, my own vision of who and what I am and what my journey is all about as I stride "deeper and deeper into the world." Only when I listen to my own voice and chart my own course will the stars burn through and guide me safely inside to who I am