When Great Trees Fall

- **Loss and mourning:**

The poem opens with a metaphor where the falling of great trees symboliges the death of significant figures. This creates a powerful emotional landscape, suggesting that the loss of such individuals sends shockwaves through the natural order.

The animals reacting by seeking safety evoke a sense of primal fear and instinct. This suggests that the death of a great soul disturbs not only the human realm but also the natural world.

- **Memory and reflection:**

Angelou skilfully navigates the theme of memory, suggesting that loss brings an acute awareness of what has been lost. The lines about "kind words unsaid" and "promised walks never taken" evoke a sense of regret. This reflection on missed opportunities highlights the human tendency to take relationships for granted until it is too late.

The act of remembering becomes both a source of pain and a means of honouring the deceased. The "hurtful clarity" mentioned in the poem reflects how grief can sharpen our perception, making us painfully aware of what we had and what we have lost.

Style

The poem is characterised by rich imagery, metaphor and rhythmic flow. It is written in free verse.

Tone

The tone of the poem shifts as it moves from sorrow to hope. Initially, the tone is reflective. However, by the end, the tone becomes more uplifting.

Mood

The mood of the poem fluctuates consistently. At the outset, the mood is one of sadness, confusion and loss. However, as the poem progresses, the mood transitions to one of hope and renewal.

Theme

This poem explores the loss of a loved one and the deep grief that follows. The poem shows how this loss affects both people and nature, emphasizing the pain and emptiness it brings. However, it also highlights grief and acceptance, showing that, with time, memories help in healing.
Angelou stresses individual greatness and cultural change, encouraging people to honour the legacy of those who have passed by growing and improving themselves. The poem carries a message of hope, resilience and the interconnectedness of life and death, making it meaningful for everyone.