To what extent do the texts you have studied reveal both the emotional and intellectual responses provoked by the experience of discovering?

Discovery is paradoxical by nature, having the potential to provoke emotional and intellectual responses, while raising esoteric questions about humanity’s philosophical existence. Robert Frost’s free-verse narrative poem ‘Mending Wall’ examines the universality of the human condition. In the same way, Frost’s alluring poem ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ provokes a renewed perception on humanity’s existential outlook. Likewise J.K Rowling’s 2008 Harvard commencement speech The Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination depicts this process through the exploration of unconventional confronting perspectives. Values are challenged emotionally and intellectually with limitless ramifications for the individual, making them aware of the fallacies in their beliefs.

Discoveries often inspire revelation and reflection within an individual, which facilitate renewed understandings of others and the world. Robert Frost’s ‘Mending Wall’ presents two markedly distinctive ideas about social isolation and companionship. The metaphorical “He is all pine and I am apple orchard” captures the contrasting nature of the speaker and his neighbour as well as the differences in society. The physical process of the annual ‘spring mending-time’ prompts the reader to reflect on the necessity of the wall and question its superfluous existence, “Why do they make good neighbours?” The rhetorical posturing examines the neighbour’s values in keeping his father’s tradition, as the speaker wants to abolish their differences and encourage an existence without physical barriers. Their conflicting perspectives challenges the reader to explore their own perceptions of who ‘was walling in or walling out’. The deliberate use of metaphor in ‘old-stone savage; implies the lack of sophistication and the wilful ignorance of suppressing the unknown, which symbolically leaves the individual ‘in darkness’. The symbolic motifs as extended metaphors lead responders to the discovery that we must free ourselves from self-imposed boundaries. The persona accepts the neighbour’s adage “good fences make good neighbours”, discovering that differences amongst people is unavoidable and the only solution is to maintain the figurative divide and establish identities, which dictates the way people function in society. The synecdoche of the neighbour and the wall is symbolic of the flawed interpersonal relationships within society and the essential nature of divisions such as religion. People discover that exact boundaries ironically allow them freedom of expression to pursue their ambitions and promote more harmonious relationships. Thus, provide individuals with a meaningful impact on their sense of self within society and learn the necessity of differences and divisions.

Similarly, J.K. Rowling’s speech invites responders to consider the culturally unpopular response of failure as a method of discovering our full potential, drawing on personal anecdotes. Much like Frost’s ‘Mending Wall’, J.K. Rowling successfully creates new intellects within her audience; she brings up the controversial idea that failure and imagination leads to discovery however the audience viewed it as tragedy since most of them knew nothing came from studying. Rowling raises ethos by using an anecdote of her “own graduation” developing a sense of self within society and learn the necessity of differences and divisions. From her own graduation day, she “had failed on an epic scale” leading to the philosophical discovery that success comes from failure and failure is a part of life. She learns to accept failure, just like the persona in ‘Mending Wall’ accepts his neighbour’s persistence. Hence the emotional response provoked in her audience, reveals the unconventional perspectives of discovery.

Self-discovery can assist an individual in gaining a new perspective on existential outlook, fostering a deeper understanding of their raison d’etre. Robert Frost’s ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ expresses the duality of the narrator’s response to the woods, caught in the contrast between the relaxed, anecdotal idiom of the first three lines and the dream-like tranquility and hypnotic verbal music of the last. The hyperbaton of “whose woods these are I think I know” emphasises the sibylline setting and the contradiction and uncertainty of interior monologue. Feeling the full force of nature luring him into the woods, the rider takes a momentary halt to his routine. His horse thinks “it queer” and “gives his harness bells a shake” to shake him back into commonsense and reality by invoking his ‘promises’. The double entendre “And miles to go before I sleep” provides a sonorous effect and emphasises the repetitive tedium that makes the woods an attractive alternative to his everyday mundane responsibilities. The dichotomy of the persona’s obligations both to the woods and to a world of “promises” invokes a meaningful impact of discovery. The title of the poem proposes that the escape he seeks is not permanent; he is only ‘stopping by’ and the beauty of the natural world offers the relief he needs, as his outward journey becomes a symbol for his inner journey to discovery. Frost creates euphony by rhyming each of the final words in the last stanza, creating a finality and reaffirmation of the sentiment. This revelatory, existential experience exemplifies how discoveries can have a meaningful impact on one’s sense of self and their outlook on “promises” in life.

In The Fringe Benefits of Failure J.K. Rowling stresses the importance of considering failure as fuel for self-improvement. In failure, you experience your greatest fears, and realise which you value most similar to the rider choosing obligations over the woods. Failure and imagination have completely opposite connotations on existential outlook. The reversal in “as is a tale: not how long it is, but how good it is, is what matters” forces the audience to understand the message similar to the rider being forced back into reality by the shaking of bells. The self-discovery of the graduates deepened their understanding of existential outlook and enlightens them to a renewed perception on one’s sense of self.

Through the judicious selection of texts, the paradoxical nature of discovery in their effective representations is encompassed, unified in a call for a re-evaluation of humanity’s role. Robert Frost’s poems ‘Stopping by Woods’ and ‘Mending Wall’ and J.K. Rowling’s speech The Fringe Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination provokes the metaphysical aspect of emotional and intellectual responses to discovery. Although both composers challenge the ramifications of human discoveries, without these new understandings, our society would not have advanced to where it is today.