

“Keeping Quiet” by Pablo Neruda

TEXTUAL QUESTION ANSWERS

(From Flamingo Textbook)

Think it Out

1. What will counting up to twelve and keeping still help us achieve?

Answer: Counting up to twelve and keeping still is symbolic of taking a pause from our busy lives. It encourages introspection, promotes peace, and helps humanity reflect on its actions. It can help achieve a moment of unity, silence, and self-realization, leading to harmony and understanding.

2. Do you think the poet advocates total inactivity and death?

Answer: No, the poet does not advocate total inactivity or death. Instead, he suggests a temporary pause—a moment of silence and reflection—not as an end, but as a means to bring about peace and understanding among humans.

3. What is the ‘sadness’ that the poet refers to in the poem?

Answer: The ‘sadness’ refers to the sorrow arising from the meaningless rush of life, constant conflicts, and lack of self-awareness. It is the realization that humans are so busy with progress and destruction that they forget to truly live.

4. What symbol from nature does the poet invoke to say that there can be life under apparent stillness?

Answer: The poet refers to the **earth**, which appears still but is always alive and active beneath the surface. This symbol highlights that silence and stillness do not mean lifelessness; they can be nurturing and vibrant.



ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS (SHORT & LONG ANSWERS)

◆ **Short Answer Questions (30–50 words)**

1. What is the central theme of the poem “Keeping Quiet”?

Answer: The central theme is the need for introspection, peace, and mutual understanding. The poet urges people to pause, reflect, and keep quiet to better understand themselves and others, promoting harmony.

2. Why does the poet ask us to keep still?

Answer: The poet asks us to keep still so we can reflect on our actions, understand the consequences of our behavior, and foster peace by momentarily stepping away from the chaos of daily life.

3. How does “Keeping Quiet” help bring peace and harmony?

Answer: It helps us introspect and break free from our constant conflicts, violence, and destructive pursuits. Silence encourages self-awareness and mutual respect, leading to harmony.

4. What does Pablo Neruda mean by “we would all be together in a sudden strangeness”?

Answer: This phrase refers to the unusual but beautiful experience of universal silence. In this shared quietness, people would feel a strange yet peaceful sense of unity and connection.

5. What kind of wars does the poet mention?

Answer: The poet refers to green wars (against nature), wars with gas (chemical warfare), and wars with fire (nuclear/armed conflict). These are symbols of human destruction.

6. What is meant by “victory with no survivors”?

Answer: It refers to the irony of war—where even those who win suffer massive destruction and loss. The cost of such victories is so high that they render the concept of winning meaningless.

7. How does the earth serve as a living example in the poem?

Answer: The earth appears to be still during winter but continues its

silent work beneath the surface. It rejuvenates life, symbolizing that stillness can be creative and life-giving.

8. Why does the poet want us to do nothing for once?

Answer: He wants us to pause from our endless activity to reflect, understand, and reconnect with life, nature, and one another.

9. What would fishermen and men gathering salt do during the moment of stillness?

Answer: They would stop harming nature and themselves. Fishermen would stop killing whales, and salt-gatherers would pause and heal their injured hands, symbolizing a break from exploitation.

10. How is “Keeping Quiet” a call for introspection?

Answer: The poem urges people to slow down, reflect on their actions and their impact, and recognize the need for compassion, peace, and understanding.

◆ **Long Answer Questions (120–150 words)**

11. Discuss the significance of the title “Keeping Quiet.”

Answer: The title emphasizes the core idea of the poem: silence and stillness. “Keeping Quiet” symbolizes introspection, calm, and a break from destructive activity. The poet believes that in silence, humans can better understand themselves and one another. The title conveys the message that true peace can be achieved not through noise and violence but through quiet reflection and mutual understanding.

12. How does the poet suggest universal brotherhood through silence?

Answer: By asking everyone to pause and remain silent, the poet creates a vision of unity. In this silence, all barriers of language, nationality, and conflict disappear. People would become aware of their shared humanity. This moment of “sudden strangeness” fosters empathy and a sense of oneness with the world.

13. What role does nature play in the poem?

Answer: Nature is used as a powerful metaphor. The earth, though it appears inactive, constantly nurtures life. It teaches that silence and stillness can be creative, not lifeless. The poet encourages humans to learn from nature's calm and regenerative power.

14. Explain the message of "Keeping Quiet" in your own words.

Answer: The poem conveys the message that in a world driven by chaos, competition, and violence, humans need to pause and reflect. By keeping quiet, people can understand themselves, reduce conflicts, and reconnect with peace. It's a call for global introspection to prevent self-destruction and foster unity.

15. Why does the poet want us to "count to twelve"?

Answer: The number twelve may symbolize a complete cycle (like twelve hours or twelve months). It represents a full moment of pause before resuming action. It's a meditative suggestion, encouraging readers to take a step back and reflect.

16. How is "Keeping Quiet" relevant to the modern world?

Answer: The poem is highly relevant as the modern world is plagued with unrest, environmental damage, and emotional disconnect. The poet's call for introspection, peace, and respect for nature aligns with the global need for sustainable living and mental well-being.

17. What contrast does the poet draw between human activity and silence?

Answer: Human activity is often associated with restlessness, violence, and destruction. In contrast, silence brings reflection, healing, and peace. The poet wants humans to embrace silence to stop harming themselves and the world.

18. What lesson can we learn from "Keeping Quiet"?

Answer: The poem teaches us to value peace, take a break from our hectic lives, and reflect on our actions. It reminds us to avoid

destructive behavior and to appreciate the beauty of stillness and self-awareness.

19. Why does the poet refer to fishermen and salt-gatherers?

Answer: These professions involve both human effort and harm—fishermen kill creatures, salt-gatherers suffer physical pain. The poet uses them to symbolize how even the most routine actions can cause harm, and how a pause can bring healing and awareness.

20. How does the poem emphasize the value of silence over speech?

Answer: The poem suggests that in silence, we understand more than in constant chatter. Speech often leads to conflict, but silence fosters thought and emotional clarity. Silence unites, while speech can divide.