

Poem - Chapter 2

An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum

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Question:

Have you ever visited or seen an elementary school in a slum? What does it look like?

Answer :

Yes, I have visited an elementary school in a slum. The school was in a pitiful state. Its dingy and neglected classrooms were devoid of even basic amenities like fan and lights. Every single window was broken and bore marks of rust. How the students in the classroom dealt with the outside noise or the winters was anybody's guess. The ceilings too were full of cobwebs. The furniture was broken and almost unusable. The walls of the classrooms were as shabby, malnourished and disinterested as the students sitting in their enclosures. Even the teachers seemed to have lost their concern both for the students and their education. Moreover, I was shocked to know that the usage of toilets was restricted to the school staff.

(A model answer has been provided for students' reference. It is strongly recommended that students prepare the answer on their own.)

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Question:

Tick the item which best answers the following.

(a) The tall girl with her head weighed down means the girl

- (i) is ill and exhausted
- (ii) has her head bent with shame
- (iii) has untidy hair

(b) The paper-seeming boy with rat's eyes means the boy is

- (i) sly and secretive
- (ii) thin, hungry and weak
- (iii) unpleasant looking

(c) The stunted, unlucky heir of twisted bones means the boy

- (i) has an inherited disability
- (ii) was short and bony

(d) His eyes live in a dream. A squirrel's game, in the tree room other than this. This means the boy is

- (i) full of hope in the future
- (ii) mentally ill

- (iii) distracted from the lesson
- (e) The children's faces are compared to 'rootless weeds'.
This means they
 - (i) are insecure
 - (ii) are ill-fed
 - (iii) are wasters

Answer :

- (a) (ii) is ill and exhausted
- (b) (ii) thin, hungry and weak
- (c) (i) has an inherited disability
- (d) (iii) distracted from the lesson
- (e) (iii) are wasters

Question:

What do you think is the colour of 'sour cream'? Why do you think the poet has used this expression to describe the classroom walls?

Answer :

The 'sour cream' may indicate a dirty yellowish colour. The poet uses the expression 'sour cream walls' to represent the colour as well as the foul smell emitted by these walls.

Question:

The walls of the classroom are decorated with the pictures of 'Shakespeare', 'buildings with domes', 'world maps' and beautiful valleys. How do these contrast with the world of these children?

Answer :

The pictures of 'Shakespeare', 'buildings with domes', 'world maps' and beautiful valley represent honor, education, civility, beauty and vastness. While, the poverty stricken and neglected kids in the classroom are an embodiment of the lack: they lack beauty, proper education, development and freedom to explore the world. Even their future does not hold any promise. In fact, there are chances these pictures may tempt them to pursue wrong path in order to find ways to attain the things indicated by them. Thus, the contrast is highlighted by juxtaposing the world as represented by the pictures and the reality of these kids confined in a "narrow street sealed in with a lead sky", both made present in the same classroom.

Question:

What does the poet want for the children of the slums?
How can their lives be made to change?

Answer :

He wants the children of the slums to venture into the outside world, beyond the boundaries of their slums, and experience a better present and future life. The elementary school in the slum does not serve any purpose with its poor infrastructure and disinterested students. The poet feels that the governor, inspector and visitors should take initiative to bring about a real change in their situation. To ensure a better way of living for them, they need to be given proper education and freedom from their present confines. They need opportunity, encouragement and optimism to be able to live life with purpose and zest.