

## **Chapter-4-Telephone conversation**

**1)**

**A)**

**1. The poem begins abruptly in the middle of a telephone call. What is the subject of discussion in the first line?**

Answer: Rent of the house.

**2. What are the general things to be discussed before taking a house on rent?**

Answer: Location, price, amenities, lease duration, and security deposit.

**3. What tone and voice are available in the first three lines of the poem?**

Answer: Formal, polite, and cautious.

**4. "Madam, I warned..."**

**a) What did the caller warn the lady about?**

**b) Why does he use the word 'warned' here?**

Answer:

a) He warned her that he is African.

b) He uses "warned" to anticipate potential prejudice.

**5. What does the poet mean by 'ill-mannered silence'?**

Answer: Uncomfortable pause indicating surprise or disapproval.

**6. When the landlady asks, "ARE YOU LIGHT OR VERY DARK?" is she only interested in the skin colour of the caller?**

Answer: No, her question reveals racist concerns.

**7. Why does the poet use 'red' repeatedly in line 12?**

Answer: To symbolize embarrassment, anger, or warning signs.

**8. A Spectroscope disperses, or separates, white light into a very wide spectrum of colours-much wider than a normal prism does. What does the poet mean by 'spectroscopic flight of fancy'?**

Answer: The landlady's imagination analyzes the caller's skin color.

**9. Why did the landlady disconnect the call?**

Answer: Embarrassment, confusion, or discomfort with the conversation's direction.

**B)**

**1. Why did the caller initially struggle to respond to the harassment meted out to him by the landlady?**

Answer: The caller struggled due to surprise and discomfort from the landlady's sudden, intrusive question about his skin color, which caught him off guard. He was taken aback by her blunt racism.

## **2. Why did the caller confess that he is an African?**

Answer: The caller confessed to being African to forewarn the landlady of potential prejudice, anticipating her reaction. By doing so, he sought to address the elephant in the room and gauge her response.

## **3. What does 'pressurised good-breeding' mean?**

Answer: 'Pressurised good-breeding' refers to forced, artificial politeness, often used to conceal true feelings or biases. It describes the social pressure to maintain a polite facade despite underlying tensions.

## **4. What do the words in capital letters in the poem indicate?**

Answer: The words in capital letters in the poem indicate the landlady's spoken words, emphasizing her loud, insistent tone. This typographical choice highlights her abrasive and confrontational demeanor.

## **5. What picture of the landlady do you get from the lines, "Lipstick coated; long gold rolled/ Cigarette-holder pipped"?**

Answer: These lines portray the landlady as refined, artificial, and possibly pretentious. Her polished appearance, complete with lipstick and a gold cigarette holder, suggests a carefully crafted image.

## **6. According to the poet, the conversation in the poem is happening in England, considered the epicenter of modern civilization. Do you think racist elements are still prevalent in modern Western society?**

Answer: Unfortunately, yes. Racist elements persist in modern Western society, manifesting in various forms such as systemic inequalities, hate crimes, and everyday microaggressions.

## **7. How do you analyze the words used by the caller to register his response? Isn't he using the same methods of the landlady?**

Answer: The caller employs sarcasm and irony to expose the landlady's racism, differing from her intention to reinforce prejudices. While mirroring her tone, he subverts it to critique her bias.

2)

### **1. Describe how the feelings of the caller change at different points in the poem.**

The caller's feelings evolve significantly throughout the poem. Initially, he is polite and cautious, inquiring about the house. However, upon revealing his African identity, he anticipates prejudice and becomes guarded. When the landlady asks about his skin color, he becomes irritated and sarcastic. As the conversation progresses, his frustration grows, evident in his mocking responses. Despite this, he maintains a witty and ironic tone, exposing the landlady's racism. The caller's emotions shift from apprehension to annoyance and finally to empowerment. He successfully challenges the landlady's biases, turning the tables on her. Through his clever wordplay, the caller asserts his dignity and undermines the landlady's prejudice.

### **2. Comment on the use of satire and irony in this poem.**

Soyinka employs satire and irony to critique racism and societal norms. The landlady's blunt questions and the caller's sarcastic responses illustrate the absurdity of judging individuals based on skin color. Irony is evident in the landlady's "good-breeding" facade, which conceals her prejudice. Satire targets societal pressures to conform to certain standards. The caller's witty remarks and

exaggerated descriptions mock the landlady's obsession with skin color. This satirical approach exposes the ridiculousness of racial biases.

### **3. Why is the colour of the speaker's skin so important to the landlady?**

The landlady's fixation on skin color stems from deep-seated racial prejudices. She likely associates darker skin with negative stereotypes or undesirable traits. Her inquiry aims to determine the caller's "acceptability" as a tenant. This emphasis on skin color reveals her biased worldview, prioritizing superficial characteristics over individual qualities. The landlady's obsession reflects societal pressures to maintain racial hierarchies.

### **4. Why is the speaker dumbfounded by the second episode of silence by the landlady?**

The speaker is dumbfounded by the landlady's second silence because it indicates her embarrassment and confusion. Her initial silence was surprise; this second silence reveals her struggle to process the caller's sarcastic responses. The speaker's clever wordplay has turned the tables, making the landlady uncomfortable. This silence underscores the caller's successful subversion of her expectations. The landlady's confusion highlights the absurdity of her racial biases.

### **5. How does the caller outwit the landlady?**

The caller outwits the landlady through clever wordplay, sarcasm, and irony. By responding with exaggerated descriptions ("West African sepia") and mocking her obsession with skin color, he exposes her racism. He also cleverly offers to show his appearance, knowing this would make her uncomfortable. By turning her own biases against her, the caller gains the upper hand, effectively challenging her prejudices. The caller's witty remarks and ironic tone undermine the landlady's authority.

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