

Poem
04

O Where are You Going?

(W. H. Auden)

Words and Expressions

fatal	—	deadly; lethal; disastrous	مہلک۔ جان لیوا
furnace	—	volcano	آتش فشاں
yonder	—	there	وہاں
midden	—	dunghill; a pile of dung or refuse	کوڑے یا گندگی کا ڈھیر
odour	—	stink; stench	بدبو، تعفن
dusk	—	evening; sundown; twilight; darkness	شام۔ غروب آفتاب
diligent	—	painstaking; careful; industrious	محتاج۔ بڑی محنت سے
twisted	—	deformed; bent; warped; distorted	مڑے مڑے۔ ٹیڑھے
farer	—	traveller; rider	مسافر

Multiple Choice Questions

Choose the correct synonym.

- That valley is **fatal** when furnaces burn.
(Board 2015)
A) green B) disastrous
C) fertile D) beautiful
- That valley is fatal when **furnaces** burn.
A) explosives B) wood
C) volcanoes D) coal
- Yonder's** the midden whose odours will madden.
A) everywhere B) around
C) here D) there
- Yonder's the **midden** whose odours will madden.
A) shape B) mountain
C) mess D) dunghill
- Yonder's the midden whose **odours** will madden.
A) looks B) commands
C) stink D) appearance
- Yonder's the midden whose odours will **madden**.
A) misguide B) materialize
C) make angry D) drive mad
- That **dusk** will delay on your path to the pass...
A) dust-storm B) darkness
C) frost D) fog
- That dusk will **delay** on your path to the pass...
A) linger B) divert
C) vanish D) dwindle
- That dusk will delay on your path to the **pass**.
A) journey B) obstacle
C) passage D) valley
- Your **diligent** looking discover the lacking.
A) decent B) late
C) hasty D) painstaking
- Your diligent looking discover the **lacking**.
A) regret B) leisure
C) littleness D) inability
- Did you see that shape in the **twisted** trees?
(Board 2018)
A) limbless B) teeming
C) leafless D) deformed
- The spot on your skin is a **shocking** disease?
A) curable B) chronic
C) horrible D) peculiar

Answers

1.	B	3.	D	5.	C	7.	B	9.	C	11.	D	13.	C
2.	C	4.	D	6.	D	8.	A	10.	D	12.	D		

Questions and Answers

Q.1 What kind of feelings does the poet create in the minds of the readers?

Ans. The poet creates feelings of awe and fear in the minds of the readers. We are awe-struck by its atmosphere that is full of dangers and horrors. However, the feeling that stays is that of courage and confidence in the journey of life.

Q.2 What do you feel after reading the poem?

Ans. We feel awe-struck after reading the poem. We also realize that fear cripples our initiative while courage empowers us to face the dangers and move on towards our destination.

Q.3 What does the title of the poem "O Where Are You Going?" signify? (Board 2008)

Ans. The poem is full of mysterious and very unfamiliar atmosphere charged with terrible warnings, evil suggestions and horrifying effects of super-naturalism. The title is more of a warning than a mere question.

Q.4 What is the theme of the poem "O Where Are You Going?"

Ans. The poem suggests that the way to glory and success is vague and full of dangers but it can only be paved through with courage and perseverance. With determination and fortitude, we can climb over the insurmountable, dominate the indomitable and achieve the impossible.

Q.5 What did the reader say to the rider?

Ans. The reader draws a grim and dark picture of the valley. He says that there would be heaps of rubbish and refuse and big fires on his way. The stinking smell and blazes would definitely tarnish rider's hopes. The valley is fatal; no one can have an easy ride through it.

Q.6 What dangers of the way does 'the reader' point out to 'the rider' in the poem "O Where Are You Going?" (Board 2007)

Ans. He points out the dangers like volcanic eruptions, stinking piles of garbage and fatal gaps in the rider's way. The reader stands for fear and wants to discourage the rider from heading towards his destination.

Q.7 What does the poet tell about the gap in "O Where Are You Going?" (Board 2007)

Ans. The poet says that the gap on the way is a kind of grave where bold and adventurous people end up. Quite pessimistically and cynically, the reader portrays the valley as a gap, and thus tries to make the rider fearful of his onward journey.

Q.8 What does "horror" say to "hearer"?

Ans. "Horror" points to the strange birds and shapeless trees and sudden fearful visions and hallucinations which will baulk all his efforts and soon the hearer will be lost in the labyrinths of suffering and misfortune. The spot on hearer's skin is a symptom of a malignant disease.

Q.9 What is the reaction of the rider to all the suggestions and warnings?

Ans. The reader symbolizes all those factors which make us disappointed and discourage us, pushing us into the mire of pessimism and frustration. The rider highlights the unyielding human courage. He ignores all the warnings and embarks upon his journey towards his intended destination.

Q.10 What does the fearer say to the farer?

Ans. The fearer discourages the farer from his onward journey. He warns the farer that his enthusiasm and fervour will find nothing but inevitable failure and that all of his efforts will go in vain when he loses his confidence, gradually but surely.

Q.11 What does the horror say about the spot on the hearer's skin? (Board 2016)

Ans. The horror tries to terrify the hearer. The horror adds to this horrific atmosphere with the news that the spot on hearer's skin is a symptom of a virulent fatal disease.

Explanation with Reference to the Context

Stanza 1:

"O where are you going?" said reader to rider,
 "That valley is fatal when furnaces burn,
 Yonder's the midden whose odours will madden,
 That gap is the grave where the tall return.

Reference:

These lines have been taken from "O Where Are You Going?" by W. H. Auden.

Context:

The poet makes us realize different elements which are out to discourage and disappoint human beings in their struggle. At the same time, he suggests that though the way to glory and success is vague and full of dangers, it can be paved through with courage and perseverance.

Explanation:

The reader stands for fear and inaction. He warns the rider of the dangers that lie ahead. He says that the rider will have to pass through a fatal valley. It has volcanoes which burn like furnaces. The reader informs him about the heaps of dung and rubbish on his journey ahead, whose stinking smell sickens and maddens the travellers. He also tries to discourage him by pointing out that the valley proves to be a grave where the brave end up. In fact, by describing the dangers and hurdles in the way, the reader tries to persuade the rider not to take the journey.

Stanza 2:

"O do you imagine," said fearer to farer,
 "That dusk will delay on your path to the pass,
 Your diligent looking discover the lacking
 Your footsteps feel from granite to grass?"

Reference:

These lines have been taken from "O Where Are You Going?" by W. H. Auden.

Context:

The poet makes us realize different elements which are out to discourage and disappoint human beings in their struggle. At the same time, he suggests that though the way to glory and success is vague and full of dangers, it can be paved through with courage and perseverance.

Explanation:

In these lines, the fearer represents the negative forces which try to dampen the resolve of the traveller. He says that the sunset will not wait for the completion of his voyage. Darkness will prevail and the traveller will be lost and dead. Thus, the fearer tries to discourage the farer from going on his journey. The words 'granite to grass' show that the journey is long having different kinds of barriers and hardships which make the path vague (*unclear*) and uncertain.

Stanza3:

"O what was that bird," said horror to hearer,
 "Did you see that shape in the twisted trees?
 Behind you swiftly the figure comes softly,
 The spot on your skin is a shocking disease?"

Reference:

These lines have been taken from "O Where Are You Going?" by W.H. Auden.

Context:

The poet makes us realize different elements which are out to discourage and disappoint human beings in their struggle. At the same time, he suggests that though the way to glory and success is vague and full of dangers, it can be paved through with courage and perseverance.

Explanation:

The two characters in these lines are the two opposing forces. One represents fear and lack of initiative (*ambition; enthusiasm*). The other stands for courage and confidence. The horror announces that the hearer is stalked by a ghost. The horror adds to this horrific atmosphere with the news that the spot on the hearer's skin is a fatal disease. These lines mark the height of fear. These horrible images are enough to cripple the traveller unless he is courageous. The poem exhorts (*encourages*) the reader to be undaunted (*brave and fearless*) in life.

Stanza4:

"Out of this house" said rider to reader,
 "Yours never will" said farer to fearer,
 "They're looking for you" said hearer to horror,
 As he left them there, as he left them there.

Reference:

These lines have been taken from "O Where Are You Going?" by W. H. Auden.

Context:

The poet makes us realize different elements which are out to discourage and disappoint human beings in their struggle. At the same time, he suggests that though the way to glory and success is vague and full of dangers, it can be paved through with courage and perseverance.

Explanation:

Having firm resolve and unflinching commitment, the traveller rejects the horrible warnings. The rider tells the reader that he is determined to set off on his journey. The farer disappoints the fearer by saying that he will remain crippled by his fears and will never see the light. Finally, the hearer leaves the horror high and dry when he says that the evil forces are in search of him, and not the traveller. Thus the final stanza of the poem sets things in right direction. It clearly reflects that we can counter (*cope with*) the anti-forces with a positive attitude.