



IMPORTANT STANZAS FOR COMPREHENSION

Read the stanzas given below and answer the questions that follow each:

1. Far far from gusty waves these children's faces.
Like rootless weeds, the hair torn around their pallor:
The tall girl with her weighed-down head. The paper-
seeming boy, with rat's eyes.

Questions

- (a) Where, do you think, are these children sitting?
- (b) How do the faces and hair of these children look?
- (c) Why is the head of the tall girl 'weighed down'?
- (d) What do you understand by 'The paper-seeming boy, with rat eyes'?

Answers:

- (a) These children are sitting in the school classroom in a slum which is far far away from the winds or waves blowing strongly.
- (b) The faces of these children look pale. Their uncombed and unkempt hair look like rootless wild plants.
- (c) The head of the tall girl is 'weighed down' by the burdens of the world. She feels depressed, ill and exhausted.
- (d) It means that the boy is exceptionally thin, weak and hungry.

2.The stunted, unlucky heir
Of twisted bones, reciting a father's gnarled disease,
His lesson from his desk. At back of the dim class One unnoticed,
sweet and young. His eyes live in a dream,
Of squirrel's game, in the tree room, other than this.

Questions

- (a) Who is the 'unlucky heir' and what will he inherit?
- (b) What is the stunted boy reciting?
- (c) Who is sitting at the 'back of the dim class'?
- (d) 'His eyes live in a dream'—what dream does he have?

Answers:

- (a) The lean and thin boy having rat's eyes and a stunted growth is the 'unlucky heir'. He will inherit twisted bones from his father.
- (b) He is reciting a lesson from his desk. He is enumerating systematically how his father developed the knotty disease.
- (c) A sweet young boy sits at back of this dim class. He sits there unnoticed.
- (d) The boy seems hopeful. He dreams of a better time—outdoor games, of a squirrel's game, of a room made inside the stem of a tree. He dreams of many things other than this dim and unpleasant classroom has, such as green fields, open seas.

3. On sour cream walls, donations. Shakespeare's head,
Cloudless at dawn, civilized dome riding all cities.
Belled, flowery, Tyrolese valley. Open-handed map
Awarding the world its world.

Questions

- (a) What is the colour of the classroom walls? What does this colour suggest?
- (b) What do these classroom walls have?
- (c) Which two worlds does the poet hint at? How is the contrast between the two worlds presented?
- (d) Explain: (i) 'Open-handed map'

(ii) 'Awarding the world its world'.

Answers:

- (a) The colour of the classroom walls is 'sour cream' or off white. This colour suggests the decaying aspect and pathetic condition of the lives of the children in a slum-school.
- (b) The walls of the classroom have pictures of Shakespeare, buildings with domes, world maps and beautiful valleys.
- (c) The poet hints at two worlds : the world of poverty, misery and malnutrition of the slums where children are underfed, weak and have stunted growth. The other world is of progress and prosperity peopled by the rich and the powerful. The pictures on the wall suggesting happiness, richness, well being and beauty are in stark contrast to the dim and dull slums.
- (d) (i) 'Open handed-map' suggests the map of the world drawn at will by powerful people/ dictators like Hitler.
- (ii) 'Awarding the world its world' suggests how the conquerors and dictators award and divide the world according to their whims. This world is the world of the rich and important people.

4.And yet, for these
Children, these windows, not this map, their world,
Where all their future's painted with a fog,
A narrow street sealed up with a lead sky
Far far from rivers, capes, and stars of words.

Questions [All India 2014]

- (a) What are the 'children' referred to here?
- (b) Which is their world?
- (c) How is their life different from that of other children? id) What is the future of these children?

Answers:

- (a) Those children are referred to here who study in an elementary school classroom.
- (b) Their world is limited to the window of the classroom. They are confined only within the narrow streets of the slum, i.e., far away from the open sky and rivers. Their view is full of despair and despondency. The life of the children seem to be bleak.
- (c) "The slum children spend their life only in the narrow streets of the land. They do not get the basic necessities of life. They are deprived of food, clothing and shelter. But the main thing that they differ from other children is freedom. They do not enjoy the freedom of life.
- (d) The future of these children is uncertain and bleak.

5. Surely, Shakespeare is wicked, the map a bad example,
With ships and sun and love tempting them to steal
For lives that slyly turn in their cramped holes
From fog to endless night?

Questions [Delhi 2014]

- (a) Who are 'them' referred to in the first line?
- (b) What tempts them?
- (c) What does the poet say about 'their' lives?
- (d) Explain: 'From fog to endless night'.

Answers:

- (a) Here 'them' refers to the children studying in a slum school.
- (b) All beautiful things like ships, sun and love tempt the children of slum school.
- (c) The poet says that the children spend their lives confined in their cramped holes like rodents. Their bodies look like skeletons because they are the victims of malnutrition. Their steel-frame spectacles with repaired glasses make them appear like the broken pieces of a bottle scattered on stones. Their future seems to be bleak. id) Their future is foggy or uncertain. The only certainty in their lives is the endless night of their death. In other words, their birth, life and death are all enveloped by darkness.

6.On their slag heap, these children

Wear skins peeped through by bones and spectacles of steel With
mended glass, like bottle bits on stones.
All of their time and space are foggy slum.
So blot their maps with slums as big as doom.

Questions

- (a) What are the two images used to describe these slums? What do these images convey?
- (b) What sort of life do such children lead?
- (c) What blot their maps? Whose maps?
- (d) What does the poet convey through 'So blot their maps with slums as big as doom'?

Answers:

(a) The images used to describe the slums are:

- (i) slag heap
- (ii) bottle bits on stones
- (iii) foggy slums
- (iv) slums as big as doom. (Any two acceptable)

These images convey the misery of the children and the poverty of their dirty and unhygienic surroundings.

(b) In the dirty and unhygienic surroundings the slum children lead very pathetic and miserable lives full of woes, wants, diseases, poverty and uncertainty.

(c) These living hells i.e. these dirty slums blot their maps. These are the maps of the civilized world—the world of the rich and great.

(d) The poet conveys his protest against social injustice and class inequalities. He wants the islands of prosperity to be flooded with the dirt and stink of the slums.

7. Unless, governor, inspector, visitor,
This map becomes their Window and these windows
That shut upon their lives like catacombs.

Questions

- (a) Why does the poet invoke 'governor', 'inspector', 'visitor'? What function are they expected to perform?
- (b) How can 'this map' become 'their window'?
- (c) What have 'these windows' done to their lives?
- (d) What do you understand by 'catacombs'?

Answers:

(a) Governor, inspector and visitor are important and powerful persons in the modern times. The poet invokes them to help the miserable slum children. They are expected to perform an important role in removing social injustice and class inequalities. They can abridge the gap between the two worlds—the beautiful world of the great and rich and the ugly world of slums.

(b) Two worlds exist. This map refers to the beautiful world of prosperity and well being inhabited by the rich and great and shaped and owned by them. Their windows refer to the lairs, holes or hovels of the dirty, stinking slums where the poor and unfortunate children of slums live. The slum children will be able to peep through windows only when the difference between the two worlds is abridged.

(c) These windows of dirty surroundings have cramped their lives, stunted their growth and blocked their physical as well as mental development. They have shut them inside their filthy, dull and drab holes like the underground graves.

(d) 'Catacombs' means a long underground gallery with excavations in its sides for tombs. The name catacombs, before the seventeenth century was applied to the subterranean cemeteries, near Rome.

8. Break O break open till they break the town
And show the children to green fields, and make their world
Run azure on gold sands, and let their tongues
Run naked into books the white and green leaves open
History theirs whose language is the sun.

Questions

(a) 'Break O break open'. What should they 'break*?'

(b) Explain: 'till they break the town'.

(c) Where will 'their world' extend up to then ?

(d) What other freedom should they enjoy?

Answers:

(a) They should break all the barriers and obstacles that bind these children and confine them to ugly and dirty surroundings.

(b) Till they come out of the dirty surroundings and slums of the town and come out to the green field and breathe in the open air.

(c) Then their world will be extended to the gold sands and azure waves as well as to the green fields.

(d) They should enjoy freedom of acquiring knowledge as well as freedom of expression. Let the pages of wisdom (contained in the books) be open to them and let their tongues run freely without any check or fear.

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