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5. You know what 'hide-and-seek' is. What would 'hide-and-speak' mean?

Answer: The expression 'hide-and-speak' here expresses the taboo of the dark-skinned people being inferior to those who claim themselves to be 'fair-skinned' and thus, more learned, sophisticated, civilised and superior.

6. Certain words in the poem are in capital letters — why?

Answer: Certain words in the poem which are in capital letters are: "HOW DARK?", 'ARE YOU LIGHT?', 'OR VERY DARK?', 'OR VERY LIGHT?'

These words exemplify the purpose of the poem which is to showcase the racist mentality of the fair-skinned. When a landlady talks to a tenant, the only matter of concern should be whether the person is suitable for staying with respect to his behaviour, financial position, etc. and not on his skin colour. These capital letters magnify the fact that it is more important for the landlady to know how dark-skinned the person on the other side of the phone is, rather than how erudite or intellectual or well-behaved he might be.

7. Why do you think that the poet has chosen the title 'Telephone Conversation'? If you were to suggest another title for the poem, what would it be?

Answer: 'Different- are We?' could be another suggestion for the title of the poem.

However, the poet has chosen a very appropriate title for the poem - 'Telephonic Conversation'. It refers very aptly to the shallow racism being projected by the conversation between the landlady who is 'white' and the poet who is 'dark'. The telephone symbolises the gap between the two ends of the line, the impossibility for both the ends to meet.

8. The power of poetry lies in suggestion and understatement. Discuss this with reference to the poem.

Answer: Understatement means to state or represent less strongly or strikingly than the facts would bear out. Thus, it is a very well known fact that it is very understating to decide one's status or level of knowledge based on his/her color. The play of words between the landlady and the poet clearly proves that a man's color and region has nothing to do with the levels of education he has attained and the power of wisdom he possesses. The questions posed by the landlady became a mockery at her own level of intellect. Thus, the poem very strongly suggests that the question of civilisation does not rest on own's color. Soyinka humorously uses sarcasm as he says 'Shamed/By ill mannered silence' when it is obvious that is the woman who is the ill mannered of the two.

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