



By Sylvia Plath

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1. In pairs discuss the following questions:

(a) When do you generally use a mirror?

Answer:

We generally use a mirror to check our appearance.

(b) Is a mirror essential for us?

Answer:

Yes, a mirror is very essential for us, as it helps us look presentable before we meet people.

(c) Given below is a list of possible reasons why a person uses a mirror. Tick the ones you agree with:

(i) to check one's appearance

(ii) to look beautiful

(iii) to make sure one is neat and tidy before going out

(iv) to check for a pimple or grey hair

(v) to apply make-up

(vi) to make a phone call

(vii) as a decorative item at home

Answer:

(i) to check one's appearance;

(ii) to make sure one is neat and tidy before going out;

(iii) to apply make-up.

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3. On the basis of your understanding of the poem, answer the following questions by ticking the correct choice

(a) When the mirror is being described as being 'unmisted by love or dislike' we understand that the mirror is

i. not misted

ii. not prejudiced

iii. has four angles

iv. silver in colour

Answer:

ii. not prejudiced

(b) The other word for 'contemplation' is.....

i. contempt

ii. meditation

iii. mediation

iv. thoughtful

Answer:

ii. meditation

(c) When the mirror says 'it has no preconceptions' it means that:

i. it reflects back an image objectively

ii. it modifies an image as it reflects it

iii. it beautifies an image as it reflects it

iv. it gives a biased view of a person/object

Answer:

i. it reflects back an image objectively

(d) The mirror has been called 'a four-cornered god' because:

- i. it is square shaped
- ii. like God it watches you unbiased and fair from all four angles
- iii. it reflects back all that it sees
- iv. it never stops reflecting

Answer:

- ii. like God it watches you unbiased and fair from all four angles

(e) The 'speckles' refer to:

- i. a pink object
- ii. the opposite wall which has spots on it
- iii. a person with pink pimples
- iv. pink spots in general

Answer:

- ii. the opposite wall which has spots on it

(f) The phrase 'agitation of the hand' suggests that the person is:

- i. Very ill
- ii. Very upset
- iii. Very angry
- iv. Very happy

Answer:

- iii. Very angry

(g) By saying 'Now I am a lake' the narrator wants to show that

- i. the poem is not only about external beauty but also the inside of a person
- ii. the lake can also reflect surfaces
- iii. the depth of the lake is important
- iv. the lake does not show as exact an image as a mirror

Answer:

- i. the poem is not only about external beauty but also the inside of a person

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4. Answer the following questions briefly

(a) What is the poetic device used when the mirror says 'I swallow'?

Answer:

'I swallow' personifies the mirror. The mirror seems to say that the image on it is deep enough to swallow everything, passively. The objectivity of the mirror is significant.

(b) How does the mirror usually pass its time?

Answer:

The mirror usually passes its time by constantly looking at the wall opposite to it.

(c) What disturbs the mirror's contemplation of the opposite wall?

Answer:

People's faces and the darkness disturb the mirror's contemplation of the opposite wall.

(d) Why does the mirror appear to be a lake in the second stanza?

What aspect of the mirror do you think is being referred to here?

Answer:

The mirror appears to be lake in the second stanza because it has also the quality of reflecting the image of what appears before it like a lake. As whatever falls on the surface of the lake is drowned into it, the mirror also swallows whatever it sees. A new dimension, depth, is being referred here.

(e) What is the woman searching for in the depths of the lake?

Answer:

The woman is searching for her lost youth, charm and beauty in the depths of the lake.

(f) How does the narrator convey the fact that the woman looking at her reflection in the lake is deeply distressed?

Answer:

The narrator conveys the fact that the woman is deeply distressed because when she sees herself ageing in the mirror, she turns away to find her answers in the candles and the moon. She has tears in her eyes and her agitated hands express her distress.

(g) What makes the woman start crying?

Answer:

The woman starts crying when she sees her own reflection in the mirror and realises that she has lost her charm, beauty and youth. She has grown old.

(h) What do you think the 'terrible fish' in the last line symbolizes?

What is the poetic device used here?

Answer:

The 'terrible fish' symbolises the bitter truth which puts human beings to a fatal end. The poetic device used here is a simile.

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