

## Warming Up!

1. Get into pairs and discuss the following with your partners and complete the table.

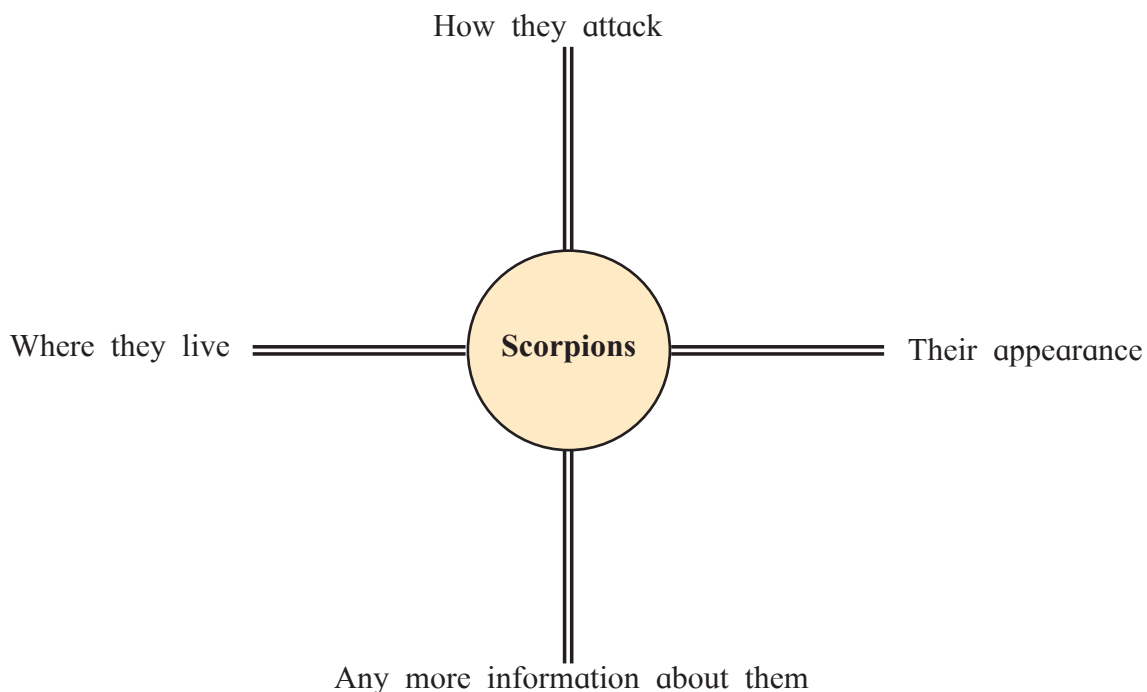
Many people are superstitious. This means that they have belief for which they have no logical reason.

An example of superstition is that – walking under a ladder brings bad luck.

In pairs, list any superstitions that you know of.

Superstition	What it implies
(1) Smashing a mirror	Brings seven years of bad luck.
(2)	
(3)	
(4)	
(5)	

2. Brainstorm what you know about Scorpions. Use the points given below.



## Night of the Scorpion

**Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004)** was an Indian Jewish poet, actor, playwright, editor and art-critic. He was a foundational figure in post-colonial India's literary history, specifically for Indian writings of a wider range.

The poem depicts the selfless love of a mother, who is stung by a scorpion.

I remember the night my mother  
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours  
of steady rain had driven him  
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.

Parting with his poison – flash  
of **diabolic** tail in the dark room –  
he risked the rain again.

The peasants came like swarms of flies  
and buzzed the name of God a hundred times  
to **paralyse** the Evil One.

With candles and with lanterns  
throwing giant scorpion shadows  
on the mud-baked walls  
they searched for him: he was not found.  
They clicked their tongues.  
With every movement that the scorpion made his poison  
moved in Mother's blood, they said.

May he sit still, they said  
May the sins of your previous birth  
be burned away tonight, they said.  
May your suffering decrease  
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.  
May the sum of all evil  
balanced in this unreal world  
against the sum of good  
become **diminished** by your pain.  
May the poison purify your flesh  
of desire, and your spirit of ambition,  
they said, and they sat around  
on the floor with my mother in the centre,  
the peace of understanding on each face.

◆ *What forced the scorpion to take shelter in the poet's house?*

● **diabolic** : having the qualities of devil or wicked

● **paralyse** : to stop an activity

◆ *What does the phrase 'to paralyse the evil' mean in stanza 3?*

◆ *Who are 'they' in stanza 4?*

◆ *Who does the word 'him' refer to in line no.3?*

◆ *Why does the poem begin with the poet's remembering the night?*

● **diminished** : to lessen; reduce

◆ *When did the Mother find relief?*

- **groaning** : a mournful sound conveying pain or grief
- **sceptic** : one who doubts general beliefs
- **rationalist** : a person who believes in reason and knowledge than opinion and belief
- **incantation** : the chanting of words that claim to have magical power

More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours,  
more insects, and the endless rain.  
My mother twisted through and through,  
**groaning** on a mat.  
My father, **sceptic, rationalist**,  
trying every curse and blessing,  
powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.  
He even poured a little paraffin  
upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.  
I watched the flame feeding on my mother.  
I watched the holy man perform his rites to tame the  
poison with an **incantation**.  
After twenty hours  
it lost its sting.

My mother only said  
Thank God the scorpion picked on me  
And spared my children.

– Nissim Ezekiel



## ENGLISH WORKSHOP

1. After reading the poem, complete the following. What happens?

There are three main parts of the poem. Do you know what they are about?  
The first one is done for you.

Lines	What is happening?
1-7	The scorpion comes into the home to escape the rain and stings the poet's mother.
8-33	
34-48	

## 2. Complete the following tables.

<b>(A) Background/setting of the poem</b>	
Type	Evidence (Quote lines from the poem)
Rural/Urban	.....

<b>(B) Scorpion</b>	
Many images of the scorpion contrast in the opening lines of the poem. Find examples of each and add them to the columns below.	
Timid	Dangerous
(1) hides .....	(i) Diabolic .....
(2) ..... back	(ii) .....

<b>(C) Imagery</b>	
Look at the description of the village peasants. What does the imagery suggest about them?	
The Images	What images suggest
They came like swarms of flies.	
They buzzed the name of God.	
They threw giant scorpion shadows on the mud-baked walls.	
They clicked their tongues.	

## 3. Choose the correct alternative.

- The child is afraid but admires .....  
 (a) the initiative of the peasants.  
 (b) his father trying every way to cure.  
 (c) the bravery of his mother.
- His father and the villagers panic and hastily suggest .....  
 (a) to take her to the hospital.  
 (b) ayurvedic treatment.  
 (c) religious remedies to help.
- The poet seems to see the villagers as impractical and almost irritating which suggests that .....  
 (a) the poet is critical of caste  
 (b) the poet is critical of religion  
 (c) the poet is critical of tradition.

4. This is a ..... poem as it tells a story.
  - (a) reflective
  - (b) imaginative
  - (c) narrative
5. Using the first person gives the feeling that it is told from .....
  - (a) personal experience
  - (b) public experience
  - (c) private experience
6. 'The scorpion picked on me. And spared my children' depicts .....
  - (a) mother's bravery
  - (b) mother's endurance
  - (c) selfless and unconditional love of mother.
7. The poem does not have a rhyme scheme, which means the poem is a perfect example of a .....
  - (a) Ballad
  - (b) Sonnet
  - (c) Free verse
8. The poem is titled 'Night of the Scorpion', for, the major part of the poem, .....
  - (a) the mother remains triumphant at the end.
  - (b) the scorpion is the victor.
  - (c) the father succeeds in curing the mother.
9. The peasants chant the name of God to .....
  - (a) nullify the stinging experience
  - (b) praise God.
  - (c) appease God.
10. The click of tongues reflects their ..... to the predicament.
  - (a) individual response
  - (b) collective response
  - (c) group response

**4. From the poem provide evidence for the following :**

Stages	Evidence (lines from the poem)
(a) the attempts by the peasants to help alleviate the mother's pain. (b) the action of these same peasants to kill the scorpion (c) the reaction of the rational father. (d) the various superstitions versus the 'scientific' (e) evil versus good.	

5. Read the poem and complete the table showing the qualities of the father and mother giving sufficient evidences from the poem.

Qualities	
Father	Mother

6. (A) Match the Figures of Speech with the correct definition.

Poetic Devices	
Figure	Definition
(1) Metaphor	(a) The use of the same sound at the beginning of words
(2) Alliteration	(b) An implied comparison.
(3) Onomatopoeia	(c) A comparison between two different things, especially a phrase, containing the words 'like' or 'as'
(4) Simile	(d) A word which resembles the sound it represents.

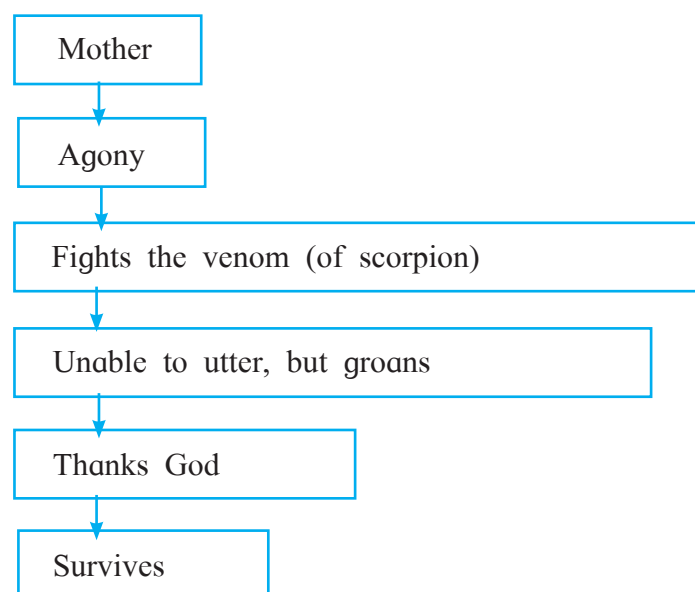
- (B) Find examples from the poem that contain :

Similie : .....

Metaphor : .....

Onomatopoeia : .....

7. Expand the flow-chart in writing a paragraph in your own words.



8. The poet has used various kinds of imagery to create an image which appeal to our senses. Pick out various kinds of imagery and complete the table.

Visual imagery appealing to eyes	Tactile imagery (sense of touch)	Sound imagery	Internal sensations, feelings and emotions
(1) Scorpion crawling beneath a sack of rice	(1) .....	(1) buzzed the name of God	(1) fear
(2) ..... ..... .....	(2) Father pouring paraffin on the toe	(2) ..... ..... .....	(2) .....

9. Write an appreciation of the poem in a paragraph format.  
(Refer to page no. 5.)

### 10. Project

Prepare a Presentation (on paper or on a PC) as a piece of reference to other students. Make use of the following points.

- (1) Title page
- (2) Introduction of the poet
- (3) The complete poem  
(All 48 lines)
- (4) Learning objectives
- (5) Style of writing
- (6) Scorpion lines (1-7)
- (7) The peasants
- (8) The poet's father
- (10) The poet's mother
- (11) Vocabulary
- (12) Credits (positive aspects)

