INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT
SENIOR SECTION
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CLASS XI
CHILDHOOD

Markus Natten

Introduction

In the poem, Childhood, the poet ponders deeply over the question of his lost childhood. He recalls a number of stages when his thoughts and perceptions about the world and people changed. He tries to identify that one particular stage or time when he lost his childhood and stepped into adulthood. He feels a sense of nostalgia for the lost childhood and finally settles down with an idea that his childhood has gone to some forgotten place and that place could only be found in an infant's innocent face.

The poet is curious to know when he lost his childhood. He tries to find out the answer of his own question. He feels it was perhaps that day when he discovered the theories of Heaven and Hell and that Geography did not provide him any information about the existence of such place. Education has made the poet look at the world different with more of reason and logic. The poet feels that he had probably lost his childhood when he had acquired a rational thinking towards his surroundings.

In this stanza, the poet figures out that the adults around him did not practice what they usually preached. They taught others to be loving and caring when they themselves were violent and mean. This is when the child lost his trust and faith in the adults. The poet realizes that probably the loss of faith and trust might have been the major steps towards losing his childhood.

The poet while growing up realizes that his mind is powerful and it takes its own decisions. His own opinions and thoughts have earned him individuality free from the biased notions of others. This is when he thinks that his individuality and experiences have taken away the childhood from him.

Finally, in the ending stanza of the poem, "Childhood", the poet changes his question from 'when' to 'where' he has lost his childhood. The answer is an easy one. Markus Natten says that his childhood has gone hiding into some forgotten place. It can be found in an infant's face. The last lines can be interpreted as that the childhood is a lost memory. We recall the fantasies and the moments associated with it but at the same time, the innocence and the childhood are irrevocably lost.

Analysis:

Theme: The poem, "Childhood" focuses on the theme of the loss of innocence. Markus Natten, the poet wonders when and where he lost his childhood. He ponders over this question and highlights the loss of innocence and faith in the quest of growing up. Adolescence or childhood is a puzzling time when a child is unable to settle with the physical, psychological and other changes in his personality. He becomes a 'young adult'; he neither wants to call himself a child nor is he completely an adult. He finally finds his answers that he lost his childhood to some forgotten place and that his childhood has become a memory.

Refrain: The repetition of the lines; usually at the end or the beginning of the poem is called the 'refrain.' Refrains carries the central message of the poem. Here, the lines "When did my childhood go?" and "was that day" are examples of refrain. The first refrain is the central theme of the poem as to when have the poet lost his childhood while the second refrain ends with an exclamation which brings out the poet's realization.

Q.1.Read the lines given below and answer the following questions:-

They talked of love and preached of love,
But did not act so lovingly,
Was that the day?

(a) Name the poem and the poet?

(b) What does the speaker find in the adults?

(c) What is the adults' attitude towards love?

Q.2.Read the lines given below and answer the following questions:-

When did my childhood go?
Was it when I found my mind was really mine,
To use whichever may I choose,
Producing thoughts that were not those of other people
But my own, and mine alone
Was that the day!

(a) What do words 'my mind was really mine' mean?

(b) Why does the poet lay stress on ' mine alone'?

(c) Which day is the poet referring to? Do you think the poet's feeling is right?

3. Answer the following questions in 30-40 words.

1.What according to the poem, is involved in the process of growing up?

2.What is the poet's feeling towards childhood?

3.What is the independence the poet is talking about?

4. Where has the poet lost his childhood? How can he get it back?

5. Is there any development of thought in the poem?