



INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT
SENIOR SECTION
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CLASS XII



FLAMINGO

AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM IN A SLUM

STEPHEN SPENDER

SUGGESTED VALUE POINTS FOR WORKSHEET QUESTIONS

SHORT ANSWERS

Q. 1. What does the poet wish for the children of the slums?

Ans. The poet wishes that the children of slums would come out of their dull, drab and surrounding. They should share the bright, healthy and spacious surroundings of the rich and the civilized.

Q. 2. What is the message that Stephen Spender wants to give through the poem 'An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum'?

Ans. In 'An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum', Stephen Spender deals with the theme of social injustice and class inequalities. There are two different worlds. Art, culture and literature have no relevance to slum children. They live in dark, narrow cramped, holes and lanes. Unless the gap between the two worlds is abridged, there can't be any real progress or development. The children will have to be made mentally and physically free to lead happy lives.

Q. 3. Why does Stephen Spender use the images of despair and disease in the first stanza of the poem, and with what effect?

Ans. Similes and metaphors are used to describe despair and disease in the first stanza. He uses them to describe the miserable and pathetic life of the slums. The slum children have been described as 'the stunted, unlucky heirs of twisted bones'. They are like 'rootless weeds'. Their faces are pale and lifeless. The burden of life makes them sit with their heads 'weighed down'.

Q. 4. This poem was written against the background of the Second World War. But Spender doesn't describe the lives of generals or heroes but of the poor children of slums. Why and how does he do so?

Ans. The poem has been written against the background of the Second World War. Instead of writing about war heroes and generals, Spender highlights the social injustice. He talks of two worlds. Both of them are incompatible. There is the world of the rich. It has nothing to do with the world of narrow lanes and cramped holes. The other is the world of slum children.

Q. 5. Crushed under poverty, disease and miseries do the little school children of slums have any dreams or hopes? What are they?

Ans. The children living in slums have to live in most miserable and sub-human conditions. The burden of poverty and disease crushes their bodies. They still have dreams. Their future

is foggy and uncertain. They have kept their hopes alive. They dream of open seas and green fields. They dream of about the games that a squirrel plays on the trees.

Q. 6. The poet says: 'And yet, for these children, these windows, not this world, are 'world'. What is the real world for them and which is not for them?

Ans. The conquerors and dictators can change the map of the world at will. But their 'map' and world is not the world of slum children. Their world is the world of stinking slums. Narrow lanes and dark cramped holes make their world. Their world is not the world of 'domes', 'bells' and 'flowers'. Their world is the world of poverty and disease.

Q. 7. 'So blot their maps with slums as big as doom'. Why does the poet express such an angry protest?

Ans. The civilized world has drawn its own map. This world has been separated from the world of slums. The dirty slums with their narrow lanes and cramped holes are little hells. The poet protests against social injustice and class inequalities. He wants that the islands of prosperity should be flooded with the stink and dirt of the slums.

Q. 8. What should governors, teachers, inspectors and other important and powerful persons do to improve the lot of children living in slums?

Ans. Two worlds exist. They are quite opposite and incompatible to each other. The gap between them must be abridged. Governors, teachers and powerful persons can play an important role in it. They can help in removing social injustice and class inequalities. They must bring them out of their ugly and dirty surroundings. All good things of life, the sea, the sun and the fields should be within their easy reach.

Q. 9. 'History is theirs whose language is the sun'. Justify the veracity of this statement.

Ans. Stephen Spender concludes the poem with a beautiful metaphor. 'History is theirs whose language is the sun'. This world is not ruled by the dumb and driven people. Only those who speak with confidence, power and authority are heard and obeyed. Their language must have the warmth and power of the sun.

Q. 10. Describe the devices used by Stephen Spender in the poem to create the desired poetic effect.

Ans. In 'An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum' the poet uses modern imagery. He employs similes, metaphors and contrasts as poetic devices to create the desired effect. 'Open-handed map' and 'slag-heap' are modern images. They are conveyed through very effective metaphors. The faces and hair of children in slums are like 'rootless weeds'. Their spectacles are like 'bits (chips) of stones'. The use of similes has been done judiciously.

Read the extracts and answer the questions that follow:

1. (a) The tall girl is burdened by the load of poverty and the trials and tribulations of life. She is so subdued and suppressed that her body and her head have been bowed down with the burden of misfortunes.

(b) The slum children's unkempt hair looks like the haphazard growth of rootless weeds. Rootless suggests that these children lack proper nourishment. The literary device is simile.

(c) Rat's eyes suggest eyes searching for food. The poet compares the boy's eyes with that of a rat because the undernourished boy is always on the lookout for food and security. The boy is deprived of the basic amenities of life.

(d) The expression signifies that instead of enjoying their childhood in the lap of nature, friskily and freely in the open grounds or beaches, their childhood is confined to the dark and dingy walls of the slums.

2. (a) The colour of the walls is pale yellow or sour cream. Sour suggest dull, decay and decadence.

(b) The poet hints at two worlds. The world of poverty and disease contrasted with the progressive world represented in the pictures on the walls.

(c) The pictures are all donations which represent a world that is deprived to the slum children. Shakespeare's head or good literature may raise desire which can never be fulfilled. Tyrolese Valley suggests natural beauty which is deprived to these children.

d) These images highlight the monotonous and dull life in an urban slum. The elementary school in a slum is so squeezed and suppressed under the so called civilized high domes that the children are unaware of the beauty of the sky at dawn. They are over ridden by the concrete structures of the cities.

3. (a) Their world is the slums which are characterized by poverty and disease.

(b) The future for these children is bleak and foggy.

(c) Lead sky is black or dull grey sky symbolic of hopelessness and despair. It represents a grey and dull existence which comprises their life.

4. (a) Shakespeare is an epitome of high literary excellence but in the schools of slums where hardly any learning takes place and where children are troubled by disease and despair, literary excellence is beyond their reach.

(b) The beautiful world of ships, the sun and love tempts these children as they are deprived of these things.

(c) The expression describes the miserable and pathetic lives of the slum children. The children in the slums struggle from foggy mornings till late nights merely to exist.

Answer the following in about 30-40 words.

1. The children inherit their parents' poverty and disease. A boy has twisted bones like his father. The slum children inherit the diseases as they are subjected to inhuman dirty cramped conditions.

2. This is suggestive of the world of dreams, the sweet and young boy lives in. Just as a squirrel frisks and frolics around in its tree house, likewise the eyes of the dreamer frisk and frolic with hopes for the future.

3. This simile describes the shattered glasses of the spectacles some slum children have to wear. It looks like the bits of glass shattered on stone. It highlights the poverty and hardships of people in slums which is irreparable.

4. Even though the world of the slum children is dark and their future bleak, their eyes dream of a better future which is distant and beyond their reach. They dream of open seas, green fields and squirrel's game.

5. The future of slum children is uncertain and bleak. Just as fog blurs one's view in winter, poverty and apathy of the officials have dimmed the future of the slum children.

6. Those people create history that outshines others. Through this metaphor, Spender feels that only those people who have courage can leave their mark. To create history, their language must have the power, brightness and warmth of the sun.

7. The poet has used the image of a 'wasteland' to describe the deplorable condition of the slum children. Their lives are barren like the wasteland, cramped and crushed under a leaden sky. Deprived of the lush green beauty of nature, they spend their life in slums surrounded by the so called civilized 'world'. The images and symbols of a 'cloudless dawn' and 'belled, flowery, Tyrolese valley' reflect the loneliness and barrenness of this wasteland where there is no hope for the future.
