

CLASS XII

FLAMINGO | ENGLISH

POEM: KEEPING QUIET

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pablo Neruda (1904 – 1973) was the ‘pen name’ and later, ‘legal name’ of this famous Chilean poet – diplomat – politician. He won the Noble prize for literature in the year 1971. He wrote in green ink which was his personal symbol for desire and hope. His writings are simple, wherein lies their beauty.

Originally written in Spanish, the essence of this poem is based on introspection and retrospection. The poet feels that some soul – searching is needed for us to be at peace with ourselves and others.

THEME

This poem is about the necessity of quiet introspection and creating a feeling of mutual understanding among human beings.

SUMMARY

“Keeping Quiet” is a peace poem written by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. The poet asks humanity to count numbers from one to twelve - twelve being the number of hours shown in a clock or the number of zodiac signs. He requests everyone not to speak because languages create barriers between people. The moment when everyone stops moving their body will be very special and different as we have never experienced such a moment before.

The poet says that in this period of inactivity the fishermen would not harm the whales, the salt gatherers will not hurt their hands, those who are busy destroying the nature will adopt a new approach towards life, The men who are preparing for wars and victory based on deaths of innocent people will join their enemy and stand in unity with them, doing nothing. No one will harm himself or any other person. Everyone will unite and ponder upon his acts and realize the results of his deeds.

The poet clarifies his idea and says further that he does not want that people should stand idle. He wants that there should be no war because he does not want to see trucks laden with dead bodies of the soldiers. He is promoting Universal brotherhood and peace.

The poet says that everyone is working continuously, to achieve one’s goals. People are threatened by death and the fear forces them to work endlessly so that they can achieve everything quickly. In this mad rush, they do not realize the repercussions of their acts. He wants us to pause and come out of the mad rush. He wants us to be happy about our achievements and celebrate them. He wants us to overcome the fear of death and to relax for a while. We should know the results of our deeds and celebrate our achievements.

When the people will remain quiet for a while, they will realize the purpose of their lives. Just like all the creations of nature undergo a rebirth with the change of seasons, similarly, keeping quiet will be a rebirth for the human soul. It will give a new meaning to our life. Again, the poet says that he will count till twelve and asks everyone to remain quiet while he leaves.

WORDS/PHRASES WITH THEIR CONTEXTUAL MEANINGS

Not speak in any language: be silent

Exotic: peaceful, unusual

No survivors: no winners or no losers

Threatening ourselves: self-destruction

to have no truck with : to refuse to associate or deal with, to refuse to tolerate something

POETIC DEVICES

Rhyme scheme of the poem

The poem is written in free verse. It does not follow any rhyme scheme.

Figures of Speech

Anaphora: Two consecutive lines starting with the word 'Let's'

**let's not speak in any language,
let's stop for one second,**

Alliteration: the repetition of a consonant sound at the start of 2 or more closely placed words.

'we will' - 'w' sound is repeated

'sudden strangeness' - 's' sound is repeated, 'his hurt hands' - 'h' sound is repeated

Repetition: **use of 'war'**

enjambment: A sentence is carried over to next line without pause.

and for once could perhaps a huge silence.....of threatening ourselves with death.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS (NCERT)

THINK IT OUT

Q1- What will counting upto twelve and keeping still help us achieve?

A1-If we count upto twelve and keep still, it will give us some time to analyze our deeds. It will allow us some moments to think about the result of our activities. People in the world are involved in wars and are also damaging the environment in order to achieve their aims. Unfortunately this is taking all of us toward our own end. So, we need to think in order to achieve peace and harmony.

Q2- Do you think the poet advocates total inactivity and death?

A2- No, the poet doesn't advocate total inactivity and death. He clarifies this in his poem that he wants all the people to just stop for a while in order to analyze their activities and their consequences. He wants human beings not to support war and damage to the environment.

Q3- What is the 'sadness' that the poet refers to in the poem?

A3- The sadness is the result of our own actions and deeds. According to the poet we all are in a hurry of achieving various tasks in our life. This rush sometimes proves dangerous for us. As we don't analyze our actions, so we land ourselves in a number of problems. These problems then become the reason for our sadness as referred to in the poem.

Q4- What symbol from Nature does the poet invoke to say that there can be life under apparent stillness?

A4- The poet takes the example of earth to prove that there can be life under apparent stillness. The earth never gets inactive. We experience the change in the seasons which brings so many different things with it. In winters, things come to a standstill as the water bodies freeze; the trees shed their leaves, etc. But as soon as the spring season comes, it brings with it the lovely flowers, flowing rivers and a new life is given to the nature. So, the poet wants to convey that we should stay calm but that doesn't mean that it will bring total inactivity and stillness.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Short Answer Type Questions (30-40 words)

Question.1. Which is the exotic moment that the poet refers to in 'Keeping Quiet'? (Delhi 2014)

Answer. The poet refers to the moment of stillness and quietness as an exotic moment. It would be an exotic moment, as such a tranquillity will initiate peace and brotherhood. There would be no movement, no talk, no activity and consequently, no violence.

Question.2. What is the sadness that the poet refers to in the poem 'Keeping Quiet'? (All India 2014)

Answer. The poet refers to the sadness which surrounds man due to not having any time for himself, the pain of not understanding what he or his fellow human beings want. He has no time for introspection; as a result, he is unable to analyse his own actions and understand its consequences.

Question.3. Which images in the poem 'Keeping Quiet' show that the poet condemns violence?

(Compartment 2014)

Answer. The images of fishermen not harming the whales in the sea and wars leaving behind no survivors to celebrate the victory show that the poet condemns violence. The poet wants the warmongers to change their blood-stained clothes to clean ones. The poet's refusal to have any association or dealing with death also shows that he is not in favour of any form of violence

Question.4. What symbol from nature does the poet use to prove that keeping quiet is not total

inactivity? (Foreign 2014)

Answer. The poet uses nature as a symbol to explain his idea that there can be life under apparent stillness. According to him, keeping quiet is not total inactivity. A seed may appear to be dead and inactive, but one day, the same seed may turn into a fruitful tree.

Question.5. How, according to Neruda, can keeping quiet change our attitude to life? (Compartment 2014)

Answer. Keeping quiet and suspending all our activities for a brief moment will give us time to introspect and analyse our own actions. We will develop a new understanding of our surroundings and thus change our attitude to life. We will check our destructive ways and try to be more positive and constructive.

Question.6. What are the different kinds of wars mentioned in the poem? What is Neruda's attitude towards these wars? (Delhi 2013)

Answer. The poet has written about wars against humanity and nature. Green wars, wars with poisonous gases and wars with fire are the different kinds of wars mentioned in the poem. Wars do good to no one. Pablo Neruda feels that such wars may bring victory, but there are no survivors. It means that there is heavy loss on both sides.

Question.7. How can suspension of activities help? (All India 2012)

Answer. The poet believes that suspension of activities will allow man to introspect, which can help them in analysing their own actions, and in solving many of their problems based on caste, religion or nationality. It will help them develop a new understanding of their surroundings, and thus make them mend their destructive ways.

Question.8. Do you think the poet advocates total inactivity and death? (Delhi 2011)

Answer. No, the poet clearly states that his asking for stillness should not be confused with total inactivity or death. He perceives life to be a continuous process, where man's activities should not lead to destruction of fellow human beings or nature, but should be channelised in a resourceful way.

Question.9. According to the poet, what is it that human beings can learn from nature? (All India 2010)

Answer. Life under apparent stillness in attitude is the thing which man can learn from nature. The Earth is never in a state of total inactivity. Nature carries on its work even where there is stillness all around. Winter is associated with inactivity, but this is not actually true.

Question.10.What will counting upto twelve and keeping quiet help us to achieve? (Foreign 2009)

Answer. The poet asks each one of us to count to twelve and then be quiet, silent and motionless. This quietness will create a moment of togetherness among all; a condition which is foremost for the survival of humanity, which is indeed an achievement. It will also give us One to analyse our actions and their consequences.

DO-IT-YOURSELF EXERCISES

Answer the following:

1. By keeping still, we can count till twelve, according to the poet. **T/F**
 2. It would be a peaceful moment because no engines would rush around. **T/F**
 3. The salt gatherers will examine the destruction their trade has done to their hands. **T/F**
 4. With whom would the ex-warriors walk?
 5. By our constant activity what destruction are human beings bringing upon themselves?
 6. Who would wear clean clothes in case there was a silence on the war front?
 7. What follows due to not understanding one another?
 8. In a noisy world we don't _____ ourselves.
 9. The _____ can teach us to be introspective I.
 10. By keeping quiet we may appear outwardly to be _____.
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