

**Poem 2****AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM IN A SLUM**

- By Stephen Spender

THEME: Social injustice and class inequalities**Main Points****Stanza-1**

- (1) The poem portrays a picture of an elementary school in a slum area
- (2) Deprived of basic facilities such as-nutritional food, balanced diet, air, sun, shine and potable water, children are least interested in studies
- (3) The tall girl and paper seeming boy-all are victims of malnutrition; they are suffering from various diseases
- (4) A boy sitting at the back is dreaming of squirrel's game. He has no interest in class-room activity.

Stanza-2

- (1) The class-room wall contains pictures and paintings -like Shakespeare's head developed cities with skyscrapers Tyrolese valley aesthetically beautiful, problem free world (cloudless at down)-they came by donations.
- (2) These pictures belong to the world of the rich and prosperous.
- (3) The world of these poor and deprived children contrasts with the world depicted on class-room walls.
- (4) The rich have drawn an open handed map which is of no use to them as their world is limited to the end of the street.
- (5) Far from rivers, capes and stars of words, their future is bleak and uncertain

Stanza-3

- (1) Shakespeare is wicked and map a bad example as they do not correspond to their limited, narrow world.
- (2) Ships and Sun depicted on the wall tempt them to experience the world of the rich with all its glory.
- (3) However, they can not get this opportunity as the responsible people do not want it.
- (4) These malnourished children wearing mended glasses oscillate between fog and endless night, having uncertain life with no future.
- (5) They pass all their time and space in the hell (the slum). This hell is a blot on the civilised world.

Stanza-4

- (1) The poet calls upon governor, inspector and visitor (representing power and position) to review the system before it is too late.
- (2) The revised system should empower these children to break away from the shakles of poverty and depravation.
- (3) He urges the civilised people to help them enjoy all the facilities such as blue-sky, sun-



shine, sea-waves, fresh air, good and sufficient nutritious diet.

- (4) Let the pages of wisdom be open for them and their tongues may run freely on the white leaves of books.
- (5) Only those people find a place in history whose language has the warmth and power of the sun.

Major features:

1- Poetic device: Simile-

Like rootless weeds
Like bottle bits on stones
Like catacombs
Slums as big as doom

Metaphors

Rat's eyes, gnarled disease, Paper Seeming boy
Squirrel's game
White and green leaves etc.

Alliteration

Far far from gusty waves
Surely Shakespeare
Bottle-bits

2- Imagery /Symbols

- (i) Gusty waves
- (ii) Rootless weeds
- (iii) Paper-seeming boy
- (iv) Sour-cream walls

Extract-1

On Sour cream walls, donations, Shakespeare's head.
Cloudless at dawn, civilized dome riding all cities
Belled, flowery, Tyrolese valley. Open handed map
Awarding the world its world.

- Q-1 (i) Which walls are mentioned in the first line?
(ii) Why is the map 'open handed'?
(iii) Explain the line-'Awarding the world its world?'
(iv) How is the sky at dawn?

Ans (i) Class-room walls in a slum area are mentioned in the first line



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- (ii) It is drawn at will irrespective of realities.
- (iii) The luxurious world of the rich is imposed upon the poor unjustifiably
- (iv) It is clear and cloudless

Explain the Last line of the poem

'History theirs whose language is the sun'

Explanation: History belongs to those who speak the language of the sun-meaning Power, energy, caliber, radiance and strength.

Extract-2

Unless governor, inspector, visitor,
This map becomes their window and these windows
That shut upon their lives like catacombs,
Break o break open till they break the town

- Q.1 Who are called upon by the poet in the first line?
- Q.2 What does the poet want them to do?
- Q.3 What is the poetic device used in the third line?
- Q.4 Explain, "Break town"?

Ans(1) Value Points

Governor, inspector, visitor, all those in power

Ans(2) To help the slum-dwellers lead respectable life with all the facilities.

Ans(3) Simile_like_catacombs

Ans(4) The edu system should empower and liberate the children from the shackles and boundries imposed by the rich and powerful.

Short Answer Questions.

- (1) Why is Shakespeare wicked?
- (2) Describe, in brief, the conditions surrounding these slum children?
- (3) Present the two worlds depicted in the poem?

Ans-1 Value Points

- Shakespear is a literacy icon and stands for the elite and seems irrelevant to these children from the slum them.

Ans-2 Poverty, diseases, malnourishment, uncertainty, bleak future.

Ans-3 (1) Slum dwellers

(2)The rich and prosperous