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Class 12 English (Flamingo) Notes

AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM IN A SLUM



Key Notes and Important Questions with Answers

An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum

– Stephen Spender

Inequality and injustice of society give way to exploitation. It is needed to uproot the social evils to make this world better place with equal facilities & opportunities. Stephen Spender shows his concern, aggression but also offers a solution through the poem. He suggests to offer these children a glimpse of a better world and to have quality education.

–Stephen Spender

Points to Remember

- The poet describes the miserable condition of the children in a school located in a slum. They are malnourished, ill and exhausted.
- They are thin, hungry, weak and insecure. One of them has inherited disability.
- Their physical and mental growth are stunted.
- The walls of the classroom give us a glimpse of prosperity which is in sharp contrast to their weak, grim, hollow and pathetic lives.
- Even Shakspeare's portrait, images of world maps buildings with domes or beautiful Tyrolese do not offer any hope for these children as they are poor, underfed and deprived in every way.
- The poet wants improvement in the quality of lives of slum children.
- They must be provided quality education also, so that they can make use of this opportunity but this cannot be achieved unless the inspectors and other policymakers make serious efforts towards this end.
- Catacombs symbolise darkness and illiteracy which surrounds these children but through proper education will enlighten their lives.
- The map is a bad example it tempts them to aspire for the word which seems unreachable for them. The maps on their walls should show huge slums instead of beautiful scenic graphic.
- They look like captives within the dirty walls of the classroom, however, their real world is outside the windows of this classroom and they need an exposure to the outside world.

- In the long run these children will be able to reap the benefits and rewrite the history of power with development and prosperity.
- The poet says if students studying in slum are truly allowed education in the form of free exploration, their language will gain the power and warmth of the Sun. They will acquire freedom of expression which will change their future and recreate history.

1. Far far from gusty waves these children's faces.

   Like rootless weeds, the hair torn round their pallor.

   The tall girl with her weighed down head.

   The paper seeming boy with rat's eyes.

Questions

(a) Which children are referred to here?

Ans. The deprived and impoverished children are referred to here. They study in a slum.

(b) Why are the children compared to 'rootless weeds'?

Ans. They are ill-fed and not looked after. They are unwanted like weeds.

(c) What does the 'paper seeming boy, with rat's eyes' imply?

Ans. It implies that the poor boy is as lean and thin as a paper. He is under developed like a rodent.

(d) What is the tone of the poet?

Ans. It suggests despair and misery.

2. And yet for these

   Children, these windows, not this map, their world,

   where all their future's painted with a fog,

   A narrow street in with a lead.... sky.

(a) Name the poem and the post.

Ans. The name of the poems is 'An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum' and the poet is 'Stephen Spender'.

(b) What do the 'windows' signify here?

Ans. The windows are a symbol of connections between the two world – the inside and the outside.

(c) Who are these children? What is their world like?

Ans. They are slum children. Their world is like a narrow street with a lead sky?

(d) What are the words that imply a bleak future?

Ans. Phrases like 'future's painted with a fog, narrow street sealed in with a lead sky imply a bleak future for these children.

Questions for Practice

1. The stunted, unlucky heir

   of twisted bones, reciting a father's gnarled disease

   His lesson, from his desk. At back of the dim class

   One unnoted, sweet and young, His eyes live in a dream

   of Squirrel's game, in tree room, other than this.

Questions

(a) What has the unlucky heir inherited?

(b) What is the stunted boy reciting?

(c) Who is sitting at the back of the dim class.

(d) "His eyes live in a dream", What dream does he have?

Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words each :

1. How does the poet describe the slum children?
2. What is the social issue that the poet raises in the poem?
3. Which world do the slum children belong to? Which world is inaccessible to them?
4. Despite being underprivileged, 'the children strive for a better future'. Comment.
5. Who can bring transition in the lives and conditions of slum children ?