

AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM IN A SLUM

This is a poem written by Stephen Spender. Class inequalities and social injustice are the main themes of this poem. The children of a slum – school present a very miserable picture. They have pale and lifeless faces. Their hair are torn around like rootless wild plants. They keep their heads down. Their growth is blocked and they inherit the diseases of their parents. They have dreams.

Neither literature nor the institutions have anything to do with these unfortunate children. The “belled and flowery” world of the rich is quite strange to them. The map of the world is drawn according to the will of the mighty. Their world has no relation with the world of dirty slums. The world of the children living in slums is confined to narrow streets sealed in with a lead sky. Their stinking world is far, far away from the wide world of rivers, capes and stars. There is no use of literature and Shakespeare for the children of slum school. The pictures of flowers, bells and beautiful valleys have no meaning for them. The map of the world has no meaning for them. It does not include their narrow lanes and cramped holes in it. The world of the rich has so many beautiful things. It has ships, sun and love. They tempt these children. They try to steal them. These children live on the heap of waste. All their time and space are spent in the foggy slums. These ugly slums are like little hells and blots on their maps.

All the governors, teachers and other responsible persons have a duty towards these children. The world of these people and children of slum school will have to be brought to a same level. Anything that blocks the progress of these slum children will have to be broken. Their world must not be confined to narrow lanes and cramped holes. It must expand to the vast golden coasts of the sky blue sea. They must be given complete freedom to express themselves. The pages of the books must open for them. They must be given opportunity to find their place in the sun.

WORD – MEANING:

Rootless= uprooted, **Cramped**= narrow, **Holes**= lairs, **Foggy**= full of fog, **Slum**= dirty settlements,

Blots= blemish

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

1. The school children of slums present a very miserable picture.
2. The school children have pale faces. They are like rootless wild plants.
3. The burdens of life keep their head weighed-down.
4. The school children have dreams.
5. Literature and the works of Shakespeare are useless for them.
6. This civilized world is of importance only for powerful persons.
7. The map of the world is meaningless for them.
8. The future of these children is 'foggy' and uncertain.
9. The school children live in narrow streets 'sealed in with a lead sky'.
10. The slums in which they live are like hells.
11. They have no joys and comforts in their lives.
12. Governors, teachers and the powerful people should try to get them out of their dirty slums.
13. The things that bind them should be burst out.
14. They must have freedom to express themselves.

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. How do the faces of the children of the slum look like?

Ans: The faces of the children of slum school look pale. Their hair look like rootless wild plants.

2. Who is the unlucky heir and what is he reciting?

Ans: A lean and thin boy having a rat's eyes is unlucky heir. He is reciting how his father developed that knotty disease.

3. Where are donations and pictures of Shakespeare's head placed?

Ans: All donations and pictures of Shakespeare's head are hanging on the sour creamy walls.

4. What is the future of these children?

Ans: The future of these slum children is uncertain and bleak.

5. What does the map on the wall signify?

Ans: The map on the wall signifies the world drawn and bartered by the rich and the mighty.

6. Who are these children? What is their world like?

Ans: These are school children living in dirty slums. Their world is foggy, narrow and polluted.

7. What kind of future does the poet foresee for them?

Ans: The poet doesn't foresee any future for the slum children. Their future is not bright but 'foggy'.

8. Why is Shakespeare 'wicked' and the map 'a bad example' for these children?

Ans: Shakespeare and his works are of no use to them. He can't help in improving their cursed fate. Nor does the map of the world concern them. This map doesn't include their world of narrow lanes and holes.

9. What tempt them and why?

Ans: Ships, sun and love are all such beautiful things. They tempt these children as they don't possess them.

10. How do they live in their 'holes'?

Ans: They live like rats in their cramped holes. Fog and darkness dominate their lives.

11. How can 'this map' become 'their window' ?

Ans: This map of the world is shaped and owned by the rich. It must also be thrown open to the poor children of slums. Only then will it become 'their window'. They will be able to peep inside it.

12. What have shut upon their lives like catacombs ?

Ans: Their dirty surroundings have blocked their progress and growth. They have been shut inside them like the underground graves.

13. What will happen if the children come out of the bonds that bind them ?

Ans: Then their world will be extended to the golden sands and azure waves and to the green fields.

14. Who create history ?

Ans: They create history whose language has the warmth and power of the sun.

References:-

1. Flamingo textbook prescribed by Education Board of Uttarakhand.

