

AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN A SLUM

By: Stephen Spender

Q: Why is the head of the tall girl weighed down?

A: This girl, sitting in the class, is physically and emotionally exhausted. This malnourished girl is the victim of the apathy of governments and society. She has the burden of poverty on her head. She has no hopes in this worthless class.

Q: Explain, "Paper seeming boy, with rat's eyes".

A: the poet uses 'simile' when he compares the boy with paper and rats eyes. The boy is weak and thin with whitish complexion just like a paper. His eyes are sunk deep into the socket. They look defensive and scared like rat's.

Q: What do the images "rootless weeds" and "hair torn round their pallor" suggest?

A: "Rootless Weeds" are the unwanted plants in a field. In the same manner these slum children are also the unwanted members of the society. With untidy hair around their pallor, these slum children also look like weeds. They are the victims of social injustice and discrimination.

Q: Explain: "unlucky heir of twisted bones".

A: The poor boy has inherited the poverty, disease and despair from his parents. He is also reciting his father's gnarled disease. The twisted bones signifies the disease like rickets and polio that affect these slum children.

Q: Who is sitting at the back of a dim class and why his eyes live in a dream? What dream does he have?

A: There is a sweet tender looking boy sitting at the back of the dim class. He has dreams in his eyes because he wants to free himself from this worthless class. He wants to enjoy himself in the open nature outside that is full of opportunities. The poet has used 'metaphor' in 'squirrel's game'.

Q: What do the windows of the class signify?

A: There are several windows in the classroom. The children can only see the street and polluted sky of the industrial slum. That's why the poet wants them to break open these windows and free themselves from this worthless class.

Q: Explain : 'Civilized dome riding al cities'.

A: 'civilized dome' shows the contrast between the life of rich city dwellers and slum people. The civilized dome is the sky that belongs to the rich and capitalist members of society. The poor children are forced to live in poverty, gloom and helplessness of slum.

Q: Explain: 'Awarding the world its world'.

Explain: 'so blot their maps with slum as big as doom'

A: the map in the class belongs to the rich and affluent members of society. it shows the beautiful worlds outside that is full of opportunities. It tempts these slum children to steal this beauty. But they are forced to live in polluted slum that has no hope for them. That's why the poet wants them to blot this map with slum to show their presence and the tell the world that they are also the members of this society.

Q: Why is Shakespeare called as wicked?

- A:** Shakespeare is one of the greatest laureates of English literature. He is taken as a symbol of knowledge and aspiration for the world. But it is quite ironical that his portrait, hanging on the classroom wall, does not inspire these slum children as there is no one to tell them about his achievements.
- Q:** Explain: “for these children, these windows, not this map, their world”.
- A:** Stephen Spender/The poet believes that the children are just slogging their time in this worthless dim class where there is no serious teaching there. These windows do not allow them to see the outside world that is full of opportunities. He wants them to break open these windows and make them the gateway to a beautiful world outside.
- Q:** What does the slag heap signify?
- A:** The slag heap signifies the pale, thin and malnourished children of the industrial slum.
- Q:** What peep through the skin of these children?
- A:** The malnourished children of the industrial slum look like skeletons as their bones peep out through their thin skin. It shows the poverty and miserable living condition of slum children.
- Q:** Explain: ‘break of break’. Or what are the freedoms that the slum children would enjoy?
- A:** Poet wants these children to break the chains of the miserable slum. There is a beautiful world outside full of opportunities. He wants them to breathe in fresh and healthy environment.
- Q:** What does the poet mean when he says, “let their tongues run naked into books, the white and green leaves open history theirs whose language is the sun.”
- A:** Stephen Spender/ the poet compares the slum children with sun that stands for height, success and energy. The poet wants these children to learn without any restriction not within the framework of this unworthy school but in the open nature outside. He believes that these children have the potential to influence the world just like the sun illuminates the world.

