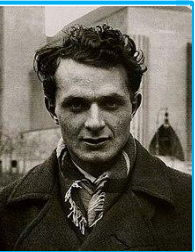




## 2 | An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum

### About the poet

**Stephen Spender** (1909-1995) was an English poet and an essayist. He left University College, Oxford without taking a degree and went to Berlin in 1930. Spender took a keen interest in politics and declared himself to be a socialist and pacifist. Books by Spender include *Poems of Dedication*, *The Edge of Being*, *The Creative Element*, *The Struggle of the Modern* and an autobiography, *World Within World*. In, *An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum*, he has concentrated on themes of social injustice and class inequalities.



Gnarled disease

### Before you read

Have you ever visited or seen an elementary school in a slum?  
What does it look like?



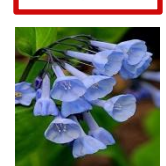
Tyrolean Valley



Squirrel in tree room



A sweet young boy



Belled flower



Shakespeare

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. 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.

On sour cream walls, donations. Shakespeare's  
head, Cloudless at dawn, civilized **dome** riding all  
cities.

Belled, flowery, Tyrolean valley. Open-handed  
map Awarding the world its world. And yet, for  
these Children, these windows, not this map,  
their world, Where all their future's painted with  
a fog,

1. **Gusty**: Sudden brief rush of wind

2. **Pallor**: A weak dull face

3. **Stunted**: hindered growth due to malnutrition.

3. **Heir**: A person who legally receives the ancestral property

4. **Gnarled**: full of knots and twists.

4. **Dome**: hemispherical roof or ceiling.



**Capes:** piece of land coming out of sea like Peninsula



Anarrow street sealed in with a lead sky  
Far far from rivers, **cap**es, and stars of words.

Surely, Shakespeare is **wicked**, the map a bad example,  
With ships and sun and love tempting them to steal—  
For lives that **slyly** turn in their cramped holes  
From fog to endless night? On their slag heap, these children  
Wear skins peeped through by bones and spectacles of steel  
With mended glass, like bottle bits on stones.  
All of their time and space are foggy slum.  
So **blot** their maps with slums as big as **doom**.

**Capes:** Something morally bad

**Slyly:** cleverly, hideously



**Blot:** A mark of reproach

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  
And show the children to green fields, and make their world  
Run **azure** on gold sands, and let their tongues  
Run naked into books the white and green leaves open  
History theirs whose language is the sun.

**Doom:** Death, Ruin



**Catacomb:** underground tunnels for burying dead bodies



**Cramped house:** Small squalid houses with lack of facilities

**Azure:** blue clear sky

**Sun:** Enegery, Height, Success

