

Grade VIII - English

Lesson 5. The School Boy

Poetry

Soul of the Poem

The boy loves to wake up to see the summer mornings. The sound of the birds singing and the huntsman's horn are both pleasant. It seemed to him as if the skylark was singing with him. All of this was such a sweet company to him.

The school, however, took away with it the joy that summer mornings carried. The little boys spent their days in utter despair under the threat of the teacher's presence. He would spend his days in anxiety, deriving pleasure neither in books nor in lectures.

The boy ponders upon the fact that freedom is so necessary during childhood. A bird, who is put in a cage cannot sing for it derives joy from his freedom. Similarly, a child like a caged bird be happy by living in constant fear.

The boy addresses his parents trying to explain them that just like spring is meaningless without flowers, similarly childhood is meaningless without freedom. By nipping the buds before they blossom they would make the world an unpleasant place. In such conditions how would they derive happiness associated with summer and spring. The joy of childhood makes a person remember that phase for a life time. Depriving the children of that joy would be to doom them to a life of everlasting sorrow.

Stanzawise Explanation of the Poem

Stanza 1

I love to rise in a summer morn,
When the birds sing on every tree,
The distant huntsman winds his horn
And the skylark sings with me.
O! what sweet company.

Reference :

The above lines have been taken from William Blake's poem. 'The School Boy'

Context :

The poet shares details about the little boy's joy.

Explanation :

In the opening stanza, the speaker, the little boy, shares his delight on waking up to see a summer morning. He admires the pleasant sound of the birds singing on the tree and huntsman who in the distance blows his horn or clarion. He finds the atmosphere so pleasant that he thinks that the skylarks sing with him. He finds the company of all these elements of nature very soothing.

Stanza 2

But to go to school in a summer morn,
O! it drives all joy away,
Under a cruel eye outworn,
The little ones spend the day,
In sighing and dismay.

Reference :

Same as above

Context :

The poet highlights how the boy detests going to school.

Explanation :

The boy hated going to school on such pleasant summer morning. It deprived him of all joys. He hated spending his day under the supervision of a strict teacher. The boy is forced to do what the teacher expects him to do. He, on the other hand, wanted to enjoy the gaiety of a summer morning.

Stanza 3

Ah! Then at times I drooping sit,
And spend many an anxious hour,
Nor in my book can I take delight,

Nor sit in learning's bower,
Worn thro' with the dreary shower.

Reference :

Same as above

Context :

The poet in this stanza how the boy gets frustrated by the boring teaching methods adopted in the school.

Explanation :

The boy shares with the readers his weariness. He is tired and frustrated to the core. He spends his hour at school in great restlessness and anxiety. He takes no delight in the lessons. There was nothing refreshing about going to school and learning something new because everything was taught in an extremely dull way. The boy, therefore, draws a certain correlation between 'learning's bower' and 'dreary shower.'

Stanza 4

How can the bird that is born for joy,
Sit in a cage and sing.

How can a child when fears annoy,
But droop his tender wing,
And forget his youthful speing.

Reference :

Same as above

Context :

The poet affirms the boy's desire for freedom.

Explanation :

The boy draws the imagery of a bird. A bird is born to be joyous and spread happiness through his singing. But, this he could do only if is free and not caged. Similarly, a young child in his childhood is learning to spread his wings or becoming conscious of the world around him. The constant fear or threat of someone could ruin his childhood. Just like a cage bird, he would neither then know how to be happy nor how to sing.

Stanza 5

O! Father and Mother, if buds are nip'd,
And blossoms blown away,
And if the tender plants are strip'd
Of their joy in the springing day,
By sorrow and cares dismay,

Reference :
Same as above

Context :
The poet in these lines shows the boy addressing his parents.

Explanation :
In this stanza, the boy addresses his parents. He tries to explain to them that if buds were nipped then no one would have ever known the beauty and fragrance that a flower spread. Similarly, if plants were destroyed when they were still tender, spring would never be a happy occasion. Anything that is obstructed from its growth in a tender age is ruined for a lifetime.

The boy compares his growth and development with such natural imagery to convey his point.

Stanza 6

How shall the summer arise in joy,
Or the summer fruits appear?

Reference :
Same as above

Context :
The final couplet is an extension of the point that the poet made in the previous stanza.

Explanation :
If everything was destroyed before its time, buds would not bloom into flowers, plants would not be alive to give ripe fruits, spring or summer would not be associated with plenitude and joy. Just like elements in our natural surroundings require the right atmosphere for growth and then they become a thing of beauty, delivering something sweet and pleasant.

Similarly, a child requires the right kind of mixture of love, care, affection and freedom to become a pleasant and soothing person.

NCERT Folder

Working with the poem

1. Find three or four words/phrases in stanza 1 that reflect the child's happiness and joy.

Ans: "I love to rise in a summer morn."

The skylark sings with me."

"O! What sweet company."

2. In stanza 2, the mood changes.

Which words/ phrases reflect the changed mood?

Ans: "O! It drives all joy away."

"Under a cruel eye outworn."

"Sighing and dismay."

3. 'A cruel eye outworn' (stanza 2) refers to

(i) The classroom which is shabby/noisy.

(ii) The lesson which are difficult/uninteresting.

(iii) The dull/uninspiring life at school with lots of work and no play.

Mark the answer that you consider right.

Ans: (iii) the dull/uninspiring life at school with lots of work and no play.

4. 'Nor sit in learning's bower worn thro, with the dreary shower,

Which of the following is a close paraphrase of the lines above?

(i) Nor can I sit a roofless classroom when it is raining.

(ii) Nor can I learn anything at school though teachers go on lecturing and explaining.

(iii) Nor can I sit in the school garden for fear of getting wet in the rain.

Ans: (ii) Nor can I learn anything at school though teachers go on lecturing and explaining.

Read the following poem and compare it with 'The School Boy'

The One Furrow
When I was young,
I went to school
With pencil and footrule
Sponge and slate,
And sat on a tall stool
At learning's gate.
When I was older, the gate swung wide,
Clever and keen-eyed
I in I pressed
But found in the mind's pride
To cattle and barrow,
Field and plough:
To keep to the one furrow, As I do now?

RS Thomas

Ans: The two poems, 'The School Boy' by William Blake and 'The One Furrow' by RS Thomas are quite similar to each other in terms of invoking the nature to derive pleasure and joy. However, 'The School Boy' restricts itself entirely to the boy's school going phase. 'The One Furrow,' on the other hand, discusses the speaker's utter disillusionment with life at large. The boy in 'The School Boy' is bored of the dull and boring teaching methodology at school. The speaker of 'The One furrow' finds peace missing from his life, perhaps because of the over-activity associated with city life.

Chapter Practice

Very Short Answer Type Questions

1. Why is the speaker of the poem unhappy?

The speaker of the poem, a little boy, is unhappy because he doesn't like going to the school.

2. What is the boy fond of doing?

The boy is fond of waking up in a summer morning and spending his time observing birds in the tree and admiring elements of his natural surroundings.

3. Whom does the boy try to explain his situation to?

The boy tries to explain his situation to his mother and father.

4. How does the boy spend his day at school?

The boy spends his day drooping. He does nothing but sighs in distress and dismay.

Short Answer Type Questions

1. What does the poet intend to convey through this poem?

The poet offers a critique of the societal restrictions that are imposed upon the nature loving human beings. The boy longs for freedom.

But, the poet discusses how the educational system is destroying the childhood and innocence of the young children, who spend their day's 'sighing in dismay' when it school.

2. Do, you think the boy is imaginative?

Yes, the boy seems to be quite imaginative. He seems to be comparing himself to caged birds, buds and plants.

The same, boy, however, when in school, becomes dull and tired under the pressure of boring and monotonous lectures.

3. Who could the child be fearing in stanza 4?

The child may be referring to the annoyance of the school teachers. On being dull and non-respondent, he might have to incur the wrath of the school teachers.

The fear of being under the surveillance of the teachers.

The fear of being under the surveillance of the teachers and being punished by them makes the child wilt further.

Value Based Questions

The poet deeply sympathises with the boy. Do you agree?

Yes, the poet deeply sympathises with the boy's condition.

He is moved by the agony suffered by the boy on account of educational system robbing away the pleasures of 'childhood'.

The poet looks at 'Childhood' as one of the formative phases of a person's life. The poet is deeply moved to see the young boys setting frustrated because of meaningless curriculum thus imposed upon them especially when rather than shaping their personality it is destroying it.

Extract Based Questions

Extract 1

Directions (Q. Nos. 1-6) Read the extract given below and answer the following questions

But to go to school in a summer morn,
O! it drives all joy away,
Under a cruel eye outworn,
The little ones spend the day,
In sighing and dismay.

1. Who is the speaker of these lines?

- (a) The school boy (b) The poet (c) The mother (d) The school teacher

Ans: (a) The school boy.

2. Whose plight is the boy describing?

- (a) His own plight (b) The plight of the school boys
(c) The school teacher's plight (d) The father's plight

Ans: (b) The plight of the school boys.

3. Choose a phrase that indicates so.

- (a) Cruel eye outworn (b) The little ones spend the day
(c) It drives all joy away (d) Sighing and dismay

Ans: (b) The little ones spend the day.

4. What kills the joy for the boy?

Going to school kills all joy for the boy.

5. Explain then meaning of the phrase, 'under a cruel eye outworn.'

The phrase, 'under a cruel eye outworn' could mean under the surveillance of someone who doesn't allow them any respite from the dull and boring lectures at school.

6. How do the little ones spend their days?

The little ones spend their days in sighing and dismay.

Extract 2

Directions (Q. Nos. 1-6) Read the extract given below and answer the following questions.

O! Father and Mother, if buds are nip'd,
And blossoms blown away,
And if the tender plants are strip'd
Of their joy in the springing day,
By sorrow and cares dismay,
How shall the summer arise in joy,
Or the summer fruits appear?

1. What is the rhyming word of a way?

- (a) Day (b) Joy (c) Appear (d) Strip'd

Ans: (a) Day

2. Who are these lines addresses to?

- (a) Parents (b) School boys (c) School teachers (d) School principal

Ans: (a) Parents

3. What are the two seasons that the boy refers to?

- (a) Spring and summer (b) Summer and winter
(c) Spring and autumn (d) Autumn and summer

Ans: (a) Spring and summer

4. How does the boy attempt to explain his plight to his parents.

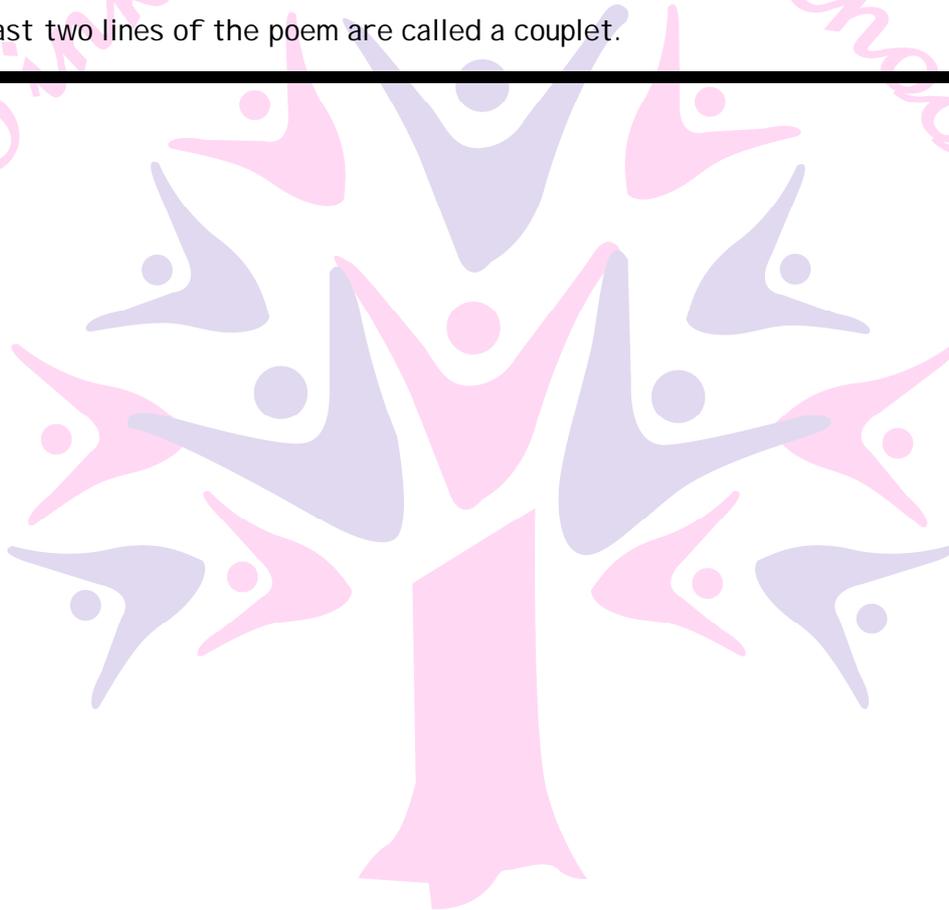
The boy attempts to explain his plight by employing the natural imagery of plants and flowers.

5. What happens if the tender plants are stripped?

If the tender plants are stripped in spring, they would not bear any fruits when the summer comes.

6. What are the last two lines of the poem called?

The last two lines of the poem are called a couplet.



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