

# A.B.M. College, Golmuri

## English Core

### I.A. & I.Com.

By Manish Prabhakar Singh

## Keeping Quiet

### About the Poet - Pablo Neruda

Pablo Neruda (1904 – 1973) was the ‘pen name’ and later, ‘legal name’ of this famous Chilean poet – diplomat – politician. He won the Noble prize for literature in the year 1971. He wrote in green ink which was his personal symbol for desire and hope. His writings are simple, wherein lies their beauty.

Originally written in Spanish, the essence of this poem is based on introspection and retrospection. The poet feels that some soul – searching is needed for us to be at peace with ourselves and others.

### **Summary**

“Keeping Quiet” is a peace poem written by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. The poet asks humanity to count numbers from one to twelve - twelve being the number of hours shown in a clock or the number of zodiac signs. He requests everyone not to speak because languages create barriers between people. The moment when everyone stops moving their body will be very special and different as we have never experienced such a moment before.

The poet says that in this period of inactivity the fishermen would not harm the whales, the salt gatherers will not hurt their hands, those who are busy destroying the nature will adopt a new approach towards life, The men who are preparing for wars and victory based on deaths of innocent people will join their enemy and stand in unity with them, doing nothing. No one will harm himself or any other person. Everyone will unite and ponder upon his acts and realize the results of his deeds.

The poet clarifies his idea and says further that he does not want that people should stand idle. He wants that there should be no war because he does not want to see trucks laden with dead

bodies of the soldiers. He is promoting Universal brotherhood and peace.

The poet says that everyone is working continuously, to achieve one's goals. People are threatened by death and the fear forces them to work endlessly so that they can achieve everything quickly. In this mad rush, they do not realize the repercussions of their acts. He wants us to pause and come out of the mad rush. He wants us to be happy about our achievements and celebrate them. He wants us to overcome the fear of death and to relax for a while. We should know the results of our deeds and celebrate our achievements.

When the people will remain quiet for a while, they will realize the purpose of their lives. Just like all the creations of nature undergo a rebirth with the change of seasons, similarly, keeping quiet will be a rebirth for the human soul. It will give a new meaning to our life. Again, the poet says that he will count till twelve and asks everyone to remain quiet while he leaves.

## **Theme**

It is basically an anti-war poem. The poet is deeply concerned about violence, cruelty to animals and plight of manual workers. The poet offers a very simple solution to many of our social, political and religious problems. The solution is self-introspection. If it is acted upon, it will be the first major step towards uniting people. The second step is that everyone should look within and analyse what is wrong and who is the wrong doer. This will cleanse every heart and ennoble all people.

'Keeping Quiet' leaves a message of universal brotherhood and peace. It urges people to stop all sorts of aggression, including that towards the environment. If we think of ourselves as the hands of the clock on the face of this earth, moving in our routine ways, won't it be a good thing to stop at twelve and do some introspection?

## **Main points**

1. The poem talks about the necessity of quiet introspection.
2. It will help people to understand themselves & will create the feeling of mutual love & relationship.
3. By quiet introspection, the poet doesn't mean total inactivity; instead he wants full involvement with life.
4. The reason for the discord & war is the imbalance between man & nature.
5. Quiet introspection will establish a spiritual & physical union that is most desirable for the survival of the earth & of human beings.

## **Question and Answers**

### **Q1- What will counting upto twelve and keeping still help us achieve?**

A1- If we count upto twelve and keep still, it will give us some time to analyze our deeds. It will allow us some moments to think about the result of our activities. People in the world are involved in wars and are also damaging the environment in order to achieve their aims. Unfortunately this is taking all of us toward our own end. So, we need to think in order to achieve peace and harmony.

### **Q2- Do you think the poet advocates total inactivity and death?**

A2- No, the poet doesn't advocate total inactivity and death. He clarifies this in his poem that he wants all the people to just stop for a while in order to analyze their activities and their consequences. He wants human beings not to support war and damage to the environment.

### **Q3- What is the 'sadness' that the poet refers to in the poem?**

A3- The sadness is the result of our own actions and deeds. According to the poet we all are in a hurry of achieving various tasks in our life. This rush sometimes proves dangerous for us. As we don't analyze our actions, so we land ourselves in a number of problems. These problems then become the reason for our sadness as referred to in the poem.

### **Q4- What symbol from Nature does the poet invoke to say that there can be life under apparent stillness?**

A4- The poet takes the example of earth to prove that there can be life under apparent stillness. The earth never gets inactive. We experience the change in the seasons which brings so many different things with it. In winters, things come to a standstill as the water bodies freeze; the trees shed their leaves, etc. But as soon as the spring season comes, it brings with it the lovely flowers, flowing rivers and a new life is given to the nature. So, the poet wants to convey that we should stay calm but that doesn't mean that it will bring total inactivity and stillness.

Read the stanzas given below and answer the questions that follow each:

5. Now we will count to twelve and we will all keep still.

Questions

(a) Name the poem and the poet of these lines.

(b) Why does the poet ask us to count to twelve?

- (c) Why does the poet ask us to keep still?
- (d) Find words from the passage which mean.
  - (ii) say number (iii) quiet and motionless.

Answers:

- (a) The name of the poem is Keeping Quiet. The name of the poet is Pablo Neruda.
- (b) There are only twelve signs on the clock to measure hours. Therefore, the poet asks us to count till the clock measures these hours.
- (c) The poet asks us to keep still as too much of activity and rush has only brought misfortunes to mankind. With our own actions, we have become a beacon of destruction both for humanity and nature.
- (d) (i) count (ii) still

6. "For once on the face of the Earth let's not speak in any language, let's stop for one second, and not move our arms so much."

Questions

- (a) Name the poem and the poet of these lines.
- (b) 'Let's not speak in any language', says the poet. Why?
- (c) What should we not do for a second?
- (d) What do you understand by 'the face of the Earth'?

Answers:

- (a) The name of the poem is Keeping Quiet. The poet is Pablo Neruda.
- (b) The poet brilliantly brings out the pain and destruction being faced by the world. Humans have been indulging in wars and bloodsheds on minor excuses. If they keep quiet, they may not indulge in reasoning, disputes and quarrels. So, let them keep quiet and not speak in any language. This will ensure peace and prosperity.
- (c) We should cease all activities for a second. Man has used his arms only to kill and destroy others. Therefore, let them not move their arms so much as to harm others.
- (d) The expression "the face of the Earth" refers to the various countries on the surface of the earth.

Q7. Why does Pablo Neruda urge us to keep still?

Ans: Stillness is essential for calm re\_ction and quiet introspection. We hear the voice of conscience in moments of silence. The poet is convinced that most of human ills and miseries are caused by man's hurry and rush to do things. The poet wishes that we may withdraw ourselves from our undesirable actions and keep still for a moment.

Q8. Why shouldn't we "speak in any language" and "not move our arms so much"?

Ans: People of the world speak in different languages. They indulge in unnecessary debates and disputes. Most of these arguments lead to destructive wars. The poet urges people to stop speaking in any language. They must speak through their hearts. So far men have moved their arms only to harm others. Therefore, the poet wants that they should not move their arms so much. Let these arms rest for once. Let a feeling of mutual understanding, be created among human beings.

Q9. How does the poet distinguish 'stillness' from 'total inactivity'? Why does Neruda say I want no truck with death?

Ans: Pablo Neruda is in favour of stillness or silence. We remain still and quiet for sometime. On the other hand, total inactivity is a permanent suspension of work. It is just like death. 'Stillness' should not be confused with 'total inactivity'. Life goes on as usual. There can't be anything like total inactivity. The poet refuses to associate with death or deal with it.

Q10. Justify the title 'Keeping Quiet'.

Ans: The title of the poem is quite appropriate and logical. It suggests the necessity of quiet introspection. The people of the world are overactive and always on the move. Their activities have caused untold troubles and sufferings. Keeping quiet will do them a lot of good. It will save them from many harmful and violent activities. Moreover, it will help in reflecting over the fate of man and help in creating a feeling of mutual understanding among human beings.

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