

CLASS IX ENGLISH LITERATURE

POETRY

THE COLD WITHIN

BY JAMES PATRICK KINNEY

SOLVED Q & A & ASSIGNMENT

Extract 1

Six humans trap by happenstance
In bleak and bitter cold.
Each one possessed a stick of wood
Or so the story's told.

(a) Identify the poet and the poem?

-> James Patrick Kinney is the poet and the name of the poem is 'The Cold Within'.

(b) What is 'happenstance'? What does the phrase "bleak and bitter cold" mean?

-> Happenstance means an accidental happening, chance or circumstances.

Bleak and bitter cold means a situation of extreme cold, cold waves which can take lives of people. It symbolizes extreme situations of life when one cannot live alone but requires the support of others.

(c) Enumerate the characters of the six people who are trapped?

-> The poet has interestingly chosen the six people who are trapped to represent human character and their sins.

(1) The first human is obviously a white woman as she is guided by racist attitude towards the black man.

(2) The second is a man who is dogmatic about his church, he is intolerant towards others who do not belong to his church.

(3) The third is a poor man who has his biases against the rich people and thinks that it is the rich people who make the poor suffer.

(4) The fourth is a rich man who is class biased, greedy and stingy, who does not want to use his resources for the poor.

(5) The fifth is a black man, whose face indicates that he wants to take revenge on the white woman for the centuries of injustices that they have suffered under the whites.

(6) The sixth, the last man is a selfish man who does nothing if profit is not guaranteed in it.

(d) What do the characters do with the stick of wood that they possess?

-> Each one of the characters is caught in his/her web of prejudices, selfishness or some other thoughts which do not let them think beyond themselves or their community. As a result each one held back their stick of wood allowing themselves and the others to suffer. The fire dies out and all the sin of them died not because of the cold weather outside but because of the lack of warmth for each other, the cold that is within their hearts.

(e) What does the poet mean by "Or so the story's told"?

-> The poet refers to the fact that this poem is a story which is being told to teach moral lesson. It is a mythical story which is passed on from generation to generation due to its immense significance.

(f) What are the elements of suspense that is being built up in these four lines?

-> The first four lines of the poem provides a brief description of the situation in which the six people are accidentally trapped in an unbearable cold wave and each of them has a stick of wood along with him. These lines also evoke suspense as to what these people are going to do with theirs in the bleak and bitter cold.

Extract 2

Their dying fire in need of logs
The first man held his back
For of the faces round the fire
He noticed one was black.

(a) What is the need of 'fire'? What does the phrase "in need of logs" mean?

-> The six humans who were trapped accidentally needed fire to keep themselves warm as it happened to be an unbearable cold wave.

The fire that was keeping the six humans warm was a dying fire and in order to keep it burning, it was in need of logs. It means that to keep the fire alive it was necessary to fuel it with logs.

(b) Why are the faces round the fire?

-> The faces are round the fire to keep themselves warm from the severe cold waves, to protect themselves from freezing to death. They are the faces of the six humans who have been accidentally trapped in this unbearable cold wave.

(c) Who was the first man? What do you figure out about his mentality from the above four lines.

-> The first human was not a man but a white woman.

The above lines tells us that she is a woman of racial prejudice as the sight of the black man did not allow her to share her stick of wood to save the dying fire, thereby saving herself and the rest of them from the severe cold. Saving the fire would mean saving the black man.

(d) What kind of discriminatory social practice does the poet talk about in these four lines? Is this kind of discrimination justified? Give reasons for your answer.

-> These four lines talks about the racial discrimination that was prevalent towards the Blacks in America where the blacks had to suffer as slaves under the white Americans.

No, such kind of discrimination is not justified as all human beings deserve to have freedom by birth.

Reasons- No human being is greater or smaller than the other.

One race does not have the right to have power over the other race.

All are equal in the eyes of God and such kind of discrimination is man-made.

Extract 3

The next man looking 'cross the way
Saw one not of his church
And couldn't bring himself to give
The fire his stick of birch.

(a) Briefly explain the context of the above line?

-> In the above lines the next man refers to the second human who was discriminatory as he cares only for people belonging to his own sect. When he looks around, he decides not to put his stick of wood to save the dying fire as he found no one belonging to his community or church.

(b) What does the poem mean by "one not of his church"?

-> It means that no one present there belonged to his own sect of christianity. In christianity too there are many divisions like the catholics and the protestant and so on. As in India, we discriminate between people based on caste, creed, religion etc. In the west people discriminate on the basis of which particular creed of christianity one follows.

(c) What does 'birch' mean? Why is he holding the birch? Is he justified in holding the birch?

-> Birch is thin-leaved hardwood tree.

He is holding the birch as he couldn't bring himself to give the fire his stick of birch being dogmatic about his church. He is intolerant and discriminatory towards others who do not belong to his sect.

He is not justified because this act of his is a sin resulting from discrimination.

(d) What do you think about the man from the above four lines?

-> He is a man who cannot overcome or rise above prejudices. He is a man living with his sin of not being able to be human, tolerant and loving towards others. He is not able to overcome his petty mindset of discrimination till the end of his life.

(e) Who was the earlier man? Is he in any way different from this man?

-> The earlier human was a white lady. She is in no way different from this man because she suffers from the same sin of discrimination based on race, caste and class. She was not ready to renounce her stick of wood to keep the fire burning because there was a black man and so she acted out of racial prejudice.

***ASSIGNMENT**

->'SOLVE THE REMAINING QUESTION FROM YOUR WORKBOOK'