

CLASS 12 English Chapter **An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum**

About the poet: Stephen Spender 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.

Answer the following questions:

1. What do you think is the color of 'sour cream'? Why do you think the poet has used this expression to describe the class room walls?
 - A. The color of 'sour cream' is off white. The poet has used this expression to suggest the decaying aspect. The deterioration in the color of the class room walls symbolizes the pathetic condition of the lives of the scholars-the children of this slum school.
2. The walls of the classroom are decorated with the pictures of 'Shakespeare, building with domes, world maps and beautiful valleys. How do these contrast with the world of these children?
 - A. The picture that decorate the walls hold a stark contrast with the world of these under fed, poverty stricken, slum children living in cramped dark holes. Obstacles hamper their physical and mental growth. The picture on the wall suggests beauty. Well-being progress and prosperity- a world of sunshine and warmth of love. But the world of the slum children is ugly and lack prosperity.
3. What does the poet want for the children of the slums? How can their lives be made to change?
 - A. The poet wants the people in authority to realize their responsibility towards the children of the slums. All sort of social in justice and class inequalities be ended by eliminating the obstacles that confine the slum children to their ugly

and filthy surroundings. Let them study and learn to express themselves freely. Then they will share the fruit of progress and prosperity and their lives will change for the better.

4. What message does Stephen Spender convey through the poem 'An Elementary School Classroom in a slum'? What solution does he offer?
 - A. Stephen Spender conveys the message of social injustice and class inequalities by presenting two contrasting and incompatible worlds, he provides a way out. For achieving any significant progress and development the gap between the two worlds must be abridged. This can be done only by breaking the barriers that bind the slum children the dark, narrow, cramped holes and lanes. Let them be made mentally, and physically free to lead happy lives. Only the art, culture, and literature will have relevance for them.
5. How can powerful persons that are governor, inspector, and visitor may contribute to improve the lot of slum children?
 - A. Powerful persons like governors, inspectors and visitors may take an initiative and start abridging the gap between the worlds of rich and poor. They can play an important and effective role in removing social injustice and class inequalities. They should break and dismantle all the barriers that bind these children and confine them to the ugly surroundings,, They will have their physical and mental development only when they leave the filthy and ugly slums. All good things of life should be within their reach. They must enjoy the freedom of expression.

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