

**ANNUAL PREPARATORY PROGRAMME FOR ENHANCEMENT IN
ACADEMICS AND REVISION (APPEAR)
CLASS XII, ENGLISH CORE - 301
MODULE - XVI (AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM IN A SLUM)**

Module Detail	
Subject Name	English Core
Course Name	Annual Preparatory Programme for Enhancement in Academics and Revision (APPEAR) in English for Class XII
Module Name/Title	An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum
Module Id	lefl_Poem_10201
Pre-requisite	Learners should have familiarity with the life in slum by recalling the lesson <i>Lost Spring</i> .
Learning Outcomes	<p>After carefully reading this poem and doing the suggested activities, you will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● relate to the theme of social injustice and class inequalities, ● Identify literary devices, expressions and other linguistic features, and ● Learn to critically appreciate the poem.
Keywords	Tyrolese valley, catacombs, wicked, stunted, gnarled, azure, donations, etc.

2. Development Team

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INTRODUCTION

Activity-1

Look at the picture given below. Observe carefully the environment of the classroom.



Now contribute your thoughts.

1. Did you think of these options?
 - a) A village school classroom.
 - b) A tuition classroom.
 - c) Friends are sitting together and studying.

- d) A Primary classroom with few teaching aids.
 - e) Poor facility with no chair and teacher to teach.
2. Have you ever visited or seen an elementary school in a slum? What does it look like?
[Note down in your notebook the details]

Let us get into the poem, *An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum* to know more about it. This poem is written by Stephen Spender, is one of the renowned English poet and an essayist. He took a keen interest in politics and declared himself to be a socialist and pacifist. Stephen Spender writes about visiting an elementary school classroom in a slum and what he sees there. He paints a picture of a classroom in an elementary school in a slum. He describes in vivid detail the children he sees there and the environment of the classroom.

[*An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum – Flamingo*, NCERT, p.92]

LISTENING AND READING

Activity-2

Click on the VLC Media Player or the link given below to listen to the audio format of the poem *An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum*. Just close your eyes and listen to the poem. Try to understand the feelings that come to your mind.



Chapter-11 An Elementary School classroom- Poem.mp3

Audio Book <https://ciet.nic.in/pages.php?id=flamingo&ln=en>

Activity-3

1. What is the tone of the poem?
 - a) Sympathy
 - b) Anger
 - c) Grief

- d) Empathy
 - e) Compassion
2. What is the poem about?
- a) Elementary school Children
 - b) Slum Children
 - c) Pleading to policy makers to turn their attention towards slum children.
 - d) Elementary school classroom in a slum
 - e) Provide better education to slum children

Activity-4

Listen to the audio second time and follow it with the text book PDF format given below. As you go through the poem, pay attention to the words, phrases and note down the new words to learn more about them.



lef110.pdf

Text Book PDF

[*An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum – Flamingo, NCERT, p.92-93*]

Activity-5

1. Match the expression with their appropriate meanings in the given table. Use a dictionary to find your answers.

Words	Meanings
i. Gusty	a) Flowery valley
ii. Gnarled	b) Very narrow
iii. Tyrolese valley	c) Twisted

iv. Wicked	d) an underground cemetery
v. Cramped	e) Stormy waves
vi. Catacombs	f) Evil

2. Can you guess what could be the age of the children described here?
 - a) Between 3 and 5
 - b) Between 5 and 7
 - c) Between 10 and 12
 - d) Between 8 and 11
 - e) Between 5 and 11
3. How does the poet connect the title with the opening of the poem?
[Write down your views in your notebook]

COMPREHENSION OF THE POEM

Let us understand the poem.

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

Stanza 1

*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.*

[An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum – Flamingo, NCERT, p.92]

Activity-6

Answer the following questions.

1. What does the expression *far far away* symbolize?

Children in the slum school are far from

- a) happy and active
- b) privilege and benefits
- c) bright and better side of the world
- d) the lap of nature
- e) lazy and unwilling

2. Do you think the child at the back will be able to realize his dream?

- a) Yes
- b) No

[Note down your reasons in your note book]

3. The poet gives a very realistic picture of children in a slum school. Pick out examples from the stanza.

[Hints: Description of the children/Language which describes children in a slum classroom]

4. Make a list of hyphenated words and describe their meanings:

(e.g. Weighed-down head- the girl is in a state of hopelessness and suffering)

5. Identify the literary device used in the following expressions:

- (a) Far far from.....
- (b) Like rootless weeds.....
- (c) Rat's eyes.....
- (d) Paper-seeming by.....

[metaphor, simile, alliteration, repetition]

Stanza 2

*On sour cream walls, donations. Shakespeare's head,
Cloudless at dawn, civilized dome riding all cities.
Belled, flowery, Tyrolese 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,
A narrow street sealed in with a lead sky
Far far from rivers, capes, and stars of words.*

[An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum – Flamingo, NCERT, p.92-93]

Activity-7

Answer the following questions.

1. What is ironic about the word *donations*? Who does it relate to?
[Hint: All the displays on the walls are donated by the rich people that are contrary to the condition of the slum children]
2. The poet uses *sour cream* to describe the wall. Do you think any other expressions given below would have been more suitable?
 - a) Dull
 - b) Unpainted
 - c) Colourless
 - d) Faded
 - e) Uncoloured

[Reflect on this and pen down your ideas in your notebook]

3. Identify the expressions mentioned in this stanza to represent the civilised world.

[e.g. Shakespeare, Tyrolese valley,...]

4. What was the poet trying to achieve through these contrast images, *Cloudless at dawn* and *lead sky*? Did it make you think upon the stark reality of slum?
5. What does the *window* of the classroom signify?

[Hints: Glimpse of the world outside the classroom which is a slum – contrary to the pictures hung inside the classroom walls]

Stanza 3

*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.*

[*An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum* – Flamingo, NCERT, p.93]

Activity-8

Answer the following questions.

1. Why is Shakespeare wicked?
 - a) Because he wrote complicated poems
 - b) Because he writes about civilised world and children could not relate to
 - c) Because he did not write poems about slums
 - d) All of the above
2. What is the meaning of the phrase “from fog to endless night”?
 - a) The poverty-stricken lives of slum children goes from bad to worse
 - b) The effects of global warming due to pollution
 - c) Both a) and b)
 - d) Neither a) nor b)

3. Why is the map a bad example?
- a) It is not an accurate map of the world
 - b) It shows the beautiful world and tempt them to steal
 - c) It is an old map and the school could not replace it
 - d) All of the above
4. Why are slums blotting the maps?
- a) Because they were drawn poorly
 - b) Because of the pollution
 - c) Because the slums are a metaphorical stain on the progress civilisation has made
 - d) Slums are dirty
5. Do you think the literary device employed in the last line of this third stanza contribute to the mood of the poet?
- [Hints: Stain in the map – don't belong to civilised beautiful world – filthy, dirty slum]

Section 4

*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.*

[An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum – Flamingo, NCERT, p.93]

Activity-9

Answer the following questions.

1. Who does the poet want to intervene to improve the condition of the slum children?
 - a) Governor
 - b) Inspector
 - c) Visitor
 - d) All of the above
2. If you are a member of the governing body what step would you like to take to eliminate the inequalities?
[Hints: Education for all – Right to Education]
3. What kind of education the poet recommends for slum children?
[Hints: More practical lesson – experiential learning]
4. What does the poet want the slum children to break open?
 - a) Silence of the slum
 - b) Shackles of their thinking
 - c) From miseries to freedom through education
 - d) Stigma as slum dwellers
5. Identify the poetic devices used in the following:
 - a) Shut upon their lives like catacombs
 - b) Break, O break
 - c) Let their tongue run naked into books
 - d) Windows

[Simile, repetition, metaphor, symbolism]

CRITICAL APPRECIATION

An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum is a poem about the slum children who are deprived of quality education and other privileges. The poem voices Stephen Spender's political ideologies, questioning the socio-economic set up of the capitalist society. The poet's first impression of the

children in the school is that their mental and physical state is far from healthy because of malnutrition and neglect. The description of *children's faces to rootless weeds, weighed-down head, paper-seeming boy, stunted, unlucky heir of twisted bones, gnarled disease*, vividly brings out their poverty, hunger and hopelessness. Secondly, he describes the slum classroom where the walls have not been painted for years and decorated with teaching aids received as *donations*. The map and the pictures hung on the walls are far from the reality of their *foggy* world.

Stephen Spender's tone changes in the third stanza and calls Shakespeare *wicked* as he talks of a world that these slum children cannot relate to. Their lives are trapped in *cramped holes* moving from *fog to endless night*. They live a deplorable life with uncertain future, *So blot their maps with slums as big as doom*. In the concluding stanza, the poet in an appealing and pacifying tone appeals to the authorities like governor, inspector or a visitor to step in and help out to improve the condition of these children. Their life shut down upon them and suffocates *like catacombs*. He kindles the spirit to break their shackles and let them run free in green fields. There is urgency in his tone. He asks them to let the children consume books so that they can rewrite their future using their literacy. Stephen Spender concludes the poem optimistically by asking the policy makers to eliminate the inequalities and bridge the social and literacy gap to build a better world.

The poem, *An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum*, has four stanzas consisting eight lines with uneven line length. Spender uses simile while comparing *children's faces* with *rootless weeds* and metaphor while describing the *paper-seeming boy* and *sour cream walls*. In the entire poem, he has used repetition *far far from*, to emphasize these slum children are far away from the privileges enjoyed by the other children from the civilised world. The use of sun, windows symbolizes the vibrant energy and limitations contrasting the two entirely different worlds. He uses repetition in the last stanza, *Break o break*, appealing to the slum children to break the barriers with brilliant use of images like *green fields, run azure, gold sands* emphasizing the need for change. He closes the poem optimistically to bring change in their condition to let them make history. A thread of irony is present throughout the poem. The tone of the poem is very profound from despair to rebellious to appeal to one of hope.

Activity-10

Read carefully the passages given below. Compare the situations of the characters in the passage with the poem and write an article to the newspaper on *the callousness of society and the political class to the suffering of the poor*.

“I have nothing else to do,” he mutters, looking away. “Go to school,” I say glibly, realizing immediately how hollow the advice must sound. “There is no school in my neighbourhood. When they build one, I will go.” “If I start a school, will you come?” I ask, half-joking. “Yes,” he says, smiling broadly. A few days later I see him running up to me. “Is your school ready?” “It takes longer to build a school,” I say, embarrassed at having made a promise that was not meant. But promises like mine abound in every corner of his bleak world.

Mukesh’s eyes beam as he volunteers to take me home, which he proudly says is being rebuilt. We walk down stinking lanes choked with garbage, past homes that remain hovels with crumbling walls, wobbly doors, no windows, crowded with families of humans and animals coexisting in a primeval state. He stops at the door of one such house, bangs a wobbly iron door with his foot, and pushes it open. We enter a half-built shack.

[\[https://epathshala.nic.in/process.php?id=students&type=eTextbooks&ln=en\]](https://epathshala.nic.in/process.php?id=students&type=eTextbooks&ln=en)

Format of Article

Title and writer’s name

Content

Expression

ANSWERS

Activity-5

1.
 - i. e
 - ii. c
 - iii. a
 - iv. f
 - v. b
 - vi. d
2. e

Activity-6

1. b, c, d
2. a

Activity-8

1. b
2. a
3. b
4. c

Activity-9

1. d 4. b

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. *World Within world* – Autobiography of Stephen Spender
2. *The Chimney Sweeper: A Little Black Thing Among the Snow* by William Blake

REFERENCES



lef1110.pdf

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- <https://epathshala.nic.in//process.php?id=students&type=eTextbooks&ln=en>
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- WIKIPEDIA – STEPHEN SPENDER https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Spender
- <https://cbse.nic.in/newsite/examination.html>

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. What does the poem *An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum* tell us about the children?
[Series: BVM/C Set: 1/1/1 – CBSE 2019]
2. Why does the speaker call Shakespeare wicked and the map a bad example?
[Series: HMJ/1 Set – 1, Code No. – 1/1/1 CBSE 2020]
3. How do we know that the children at the elementary school are coming from a slum?
[Series: HMJ/5 Set – 1, Code No. – 1/5/1 CBSE 2020]
4. What is the colour of ‘sour cream’? Why has the poet used these words to describe the classroom walls? [Series: HMJ/4 Set – 3, Code No. – 1/4/3 CBSE 2020]
5. Stephen Spender used his political ideology to voice his support on communist ideals. Write a poem expressing your personal political ideology.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS ANSWERS

[Hints]

1. Children look like rootless weeds / pale faces / physically weak / as thin as paper / suffering from inherited disease

2. Both have no relevance for the slum dwellers / tempts / paints a rosy picture
3. Poor / malnourished / unhealthy / diseases / poor condition of the school / dirty
4. Pale yellow / walls look gloomy / indicator of poverty of slums