



STEPPING STONE
SCHOOL (HIGH)

CLASS : IX

Subject: English
Topic: Poem 2

Date – 11/06/20
Time – 60 mts

WORKSHEET – 17

The Cold Within – James Patrick Kinney

[Read the poem carefully. Copy the notes neatly and correctly. Keep the pages ready in a file to be submitted on the opening day.]

‘The Cold Within’ is a poem which reflects how humanity has degenerated. Human beings have created many divisions on the basis of class, caste, religion, race, gender etc. The message of the poem is a simple one : if this discrimination continues, the world will soon surely end in chaos. In this atmosphere of intolerance, prejudice and hatred this poem reminds us to adopt a temperament of inclusion, acceptance and goodness.

About the Poet

James Patrick Kinney was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, USA, in 1923. Fueled by a sense of justice, he wanted to change the world for the better. With this motive in mind, he wrote his most famous poem, ‘The Cold Within’, a simple, straight forward and powerful poem in the 1960s in the background of the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968). This poem is a sort of a parable. It is quite strange that during his lifetime the poem was rejected by- many publishers. It was at last published in the January 2000 issue of Liguorian, a Catholic magazine, many years after the death of the poet. Kinney has actually written many poems, of which some are noteworthy such as ‘A Better World’, ‘I Can’t Change You’, ‘Never Alone’, ‘The Secret of Life’, ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Who’s To Blame’.

Now read the poem carefully.

The Cold Within

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

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

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.

The third one sat in tattered clothes;
He gave his coat a hitch,
Why should his log be put to use?
To warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back
And thought of the wealth he had in store,
And how to keep what he had earned
From the lazy, shiftless poor.

And the black man's face bespoke revenge
As the fire passed from his sight.
For all he saw in his stick of wood
Was a chance to spite the white.

The last man of this fallen group did nought,
Except for gain.
Giving only to those who gave,
Was how he played the game.

Their logs held tight in death's still hands
Was proof of human sin.
They did not die from the cold without,
They died from the cold within.

About the Poem

The 'Cold Within' conveys a useful message. It points out that we must have tolerance and love for one another. We should be kind and generous towards our fellow human beings.

'The Cold Within' gives us a useful message through a little story. Six human beings found themselves trapped together in extreme cold. Their fire – their only hope of survival in the cold – was fast dying. Each one of them held a stick of wood. If any one of them gave up his or her stick to feed the dying fire, all of them had the chance to survive. But sadly, none of them was ready to oblige for one reason or the other. It was not the cold without but cold within which was sure to perish them.

This 'cold within' refers to lack of feelings for others — cruelty, indifference, hatred, so on and so forth. Like a good parable, the poem conveys the idea that we must tolerate, if not love, one another. We should be kind and generous towards our fellow human beings. We should not allow religion, colour or any other prejudice to become mean, selfish and even self-destructive.

Stanza Wise Explanation

Stanza 1

The poem opens on a dramatic note. It attracts our attention at once by peculiar use of diction. The poet says that 'six humans' get trapped by chance in a very bitter cold. He uses 'human' and 'not people' so as to refer to all human beings.

The line-

Six humans trapped by happenstance
—is to be read carefully. Though the six persons were together in a situation

which seems to have been arranged, even though it was accidental. That is why, the poet has used the word 'happenstance', an event that is arranged. The six persons were thus in a situation from which there was no escape. They were sitting near the fire which was fast dying. Each of them had a stick of wood. This is how it is told in the story. We later realize that the stick in each hand is the symbol of sin.

Stanza 2

The fire which was dying needed to be fed with logs of wood. The first of the group was the woman who was not ready to renounce her stick of wood to keep the fire burning because she had noticed that one of them was a black. She did not want to save the black. Thus, she acted out of her racial prejudice.

Stanza 3

The next one found in the group was a person not belonging to his religion. He could not persuade himself to give up his stick of wood to help a person of another religion. He suffered from intolerance.

Stanza 4

The third man was very poor. He was in tattered clothes. He was full of bitterness and envy for the rich. 'He gave his coat a hitch', which is suggestive of his tightness. He thought it would be unjust to give what little he had to help others who had more than he. So he held his stick back.

Stanza 5

The rich man continued to sit back, and think of the money he had, and how he could save it from the lazy poor. He did not want to give anything to the undeserving poor. Thus, he showed his greed and stinginess.

Stanza 6

The black man's face showed how much revengeful he was. As the fire was dying, he thought he had the chance to hurt the white people by keeping his stick with him. He clearly suffered from the vice of spite.

Stanza 7

The last man in the group lacked generosity. As no one else had given his stick, he would also keep his stick with him. In fact, he did nothing except for gain.

Stanza 8

As the fire extinguished, all the persons died. They died not because of the cold outside but because of the cold within. They died because they were too selfish to help others. Each of them had a log still in his or her hand, suggesting that no one had renounced sinning, being unkind, for one reason or the other.

Glossary

Stanza 1

trapped : caught in a difficult situation of no escape

happenstance : chance, (here) an event

which seems to be pre-arranged, and not accidental

possessed : had

stick of wood : small log of wood

Stanza 2

held...back : did not give up, kept

black : non-white

Stanza 3

not of his church : person of different religion

bring himself to give : force himself to give (something)

Stanza 4

tattered clothes : rags

gave his coat a hitch : tightened his coat, symbolic of his meanness

idle rich : the rich who do not work hard but thrive on the labour of the poor

Stanza 5

had in store : accumulated

lazy : one who shirks work

shiftless : without ambition to succeed in life, lazy

Stanza 6

bespoke : showed

spite : hatred

Stanza 7

forlorn : lonely

nought : nothing

Stanza 8

cold without : the cold out of doors

cold within : lack of human feelings like generosity; selflessness, kindness, etc.

Title

The title of the poem 'The Cold Within' is simple, apt and suggestive. In the last stanza, the poet himself explains it. The coldness which we carry in our hearts is dangerous and fatal. It prevents us from reaching out to others, from helping and saving ourselves and others. It makes us lead a sinful life. The aptness of the title comes through the tragic end of the six persons who hold on to their sticks and let the life-saving fire go out in the deadly cold outside. They are consumed by the cold within their hearts.

Symbols

The use of symbols throughout the poem is almost self-explanatory. Log of wood in each hand is suggestive of sin. It becomes obvious that if logs are added to the dying fire, it will mean helping out someone other than one's own self. If the logs are held back, as indeed they are, it means holding on to the sins even beyond death. Each person's prejudice – envy, greed, revenge, spite, intolerance – is thus symbolically represented by the stick of wood in each hand.

The 'cold within' is a metaphor for lack of warmth, hard-heartedness, self-centredness, and inability to reach out to others. It is more dangerous than anything else.

Rhyme Scheme

Each stanza, having four lines, uses the rhyme scheme : abcb, which is an easy read. In each stanza, the second line rhymes with the fourth line. This pattern is regular and followed throughout the poem. This rhyme scheme helps the rhythm to be fast. The fast rhythm is in line with the theme of the poem – how fast greed, intolerance and arrogance can ruin you.

Figures of Speech

1. Alliteration: Repetition of similar consonant sounds at the start of adjacent words.

"In bleak and Bitter cold".

the repetition of 'b' in 'bleak' and 'bitter'

2. Metaphor: An indirect and implied comparison of 2 different things where there is a point of similarity.

"Giving only to those who gave

Was how he played the game".

In the above lines, human life is compared to a game. The last man would give something to one who could give him something in return. This is how he played the game of life.

3. Metonymy: A word or phrase used to imply something closely related to it.

" Saw one not of his church".

'Church' represents religious faith. The second man saw that a man present there was not sharing his beliefs.

4. Allegory: Convey hidden or complex meaning through symbolic figures, imagery, events, actions.

"Each one possessed a stick of wood"

Wood which means the abilities and resources of an individual to serve the human good

5. Personification: The projection of characteristics which belong only to humans onto inanimate animals, objects, forces of nature, and deities.

".....Their logs held tight in death's still hands"

the poet has personifies death into a human with a still hand.

6. Oxymoron: It is a figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction.

Eg: The last man of this forlorn group