

### Poetry

#### **The Terrorist, He's Watching**

Wisława Szymborska was a Polish poet, essayist, translator and recipient of Nobel Prize for literature in 1996.

The poem describes a situation which is very common in many countries in today's world.

The title of the poem is suggestive. It gives context and creates tension. A terrorist who wishes to achieve some kind of political objective has set up a bomb in a common bar in a street and is watching from a safe distance for the bomb to explode. The first stanza brings the setting of the situation and the second brings the visual images which are described in a detached tone. This detached tone suggests that the terrorist is completely unconcerned about the loss of innocent lives. The rest of the poem focuses on the situation at the bar. The unsuspecting people of different caliber are affected. The readers get caught up in the tension with the use of countdown technique. It also creates horror.

The matter-of-fact conversational tone without any trace of horror used to describe this horrific incident in which many innocent people are going to be killed, is striking. The picture given of the ordinary people, who are moving unsuspectingly and innocently towards violent death, gives us a sense of how unpredictable life is.

#### Questions

1. Why do you think the terrorist has selected a place like a bar for his purpose?
2. When will the bomb explode?
3. Why has the terrorist crossed the road?
4. Write the behavior of the people as described in the poem?
5. Why does the narrator say, "This waiting, it's taking forever"?
6. Who is the narrator(s)?
7. What is the attitude of the terrorist towards the victims of the bomb?
8. What is the attitude of the narrator towards the victims?
9. Why do you think the poet gives the time sequence so precisely?
10. What is the climax of the poem? What dramatic effect does it have?
11. Do you think that this poem is based on a universal theme? Give reasons.
12. Why do you think that this poem would appeal to the present day Sri Lankans?

#### **The Clown's Wife**

Johnson Agard was a Black Caribbean poet born in British Guiana in 1949. Now he lives in U.K. and well known for entertaining recitals of his own poems.

In this poem, the poet assumes the persona of a clown's wife and we are able to see the clown through the eyes of his wife. This brings out the authentic and accurate facts of his real life. The poem deals with the difference between appearance and reality and sufferings of the poor. Also it shows the difference between the public face and the private face of a person and also different aspects of life such as married life, communication, economic problems, alienation, loneliness, physical problems, misunderstanding, love, frustration, and worries in life.

Although the ungrammatical phrases used by the wife such as "I do me best" suggest that she is an uneducated woman, she is very perceptive, loving and supportive to her husband.

### **Questions**

1. Who is the narrator?
2. According to the wife how does the clown appear on the stage?
3. How does he behave at home?
4. What is the meaning of "He seems to have the world on his shoulder"?
5. What does the clown's wife do to cheer him up at home? What is his reaction?
6. Why does the wife say "poor soul" to her husband?
7. What does the last line say about the wife?
8. Do you think the husband is happy? Give reasons.
9. What is the attitude of the poet towards the clown?
10. What type of a relationship do they have? Is it a healthy relationship?
11. How does the poet present the theme?
12. Do you think this is a universal experience? Give reasons.

## **The Huntsman**

Edward Joseph Lister Lowbury, who was born in England in 1930, was a medical bacteriologist, pathologist and a poet.

This poem is based on a Kenyan folk story. This is a narrative poem which creates humour but it also teaches us a moral which is brought out very starkly and effectively. When the skull answers “Talking brought me here” for the question asked by the huntsman, huntsman was not intelligent and perceptive enough to heed the warning implied. His reaction, which was to go to the king and telling him, cost him his life. Kagwa reacted immediately and unwisely to his experience. Irony is brought out, when after his death, Kagwa himself answers the skull using the same words of warning of the skull.

This poem, which is written in simple and narrative language, has ballad-like style as it is also based on folklore which is a part of folk literature.

The moral is that *‘Talking unwisely and heedlessly is dangerous’*.

### **Questions**

1. Who is Kagwa?
2. How did he hunt?
3. What did he find in the forest one day? What was his reaction?
4. What was the answer given by the skull?
5. What did Kagwa do after that? What aspects of Kagwa’s character are proved by his reaction?
6. Was it easy for them to find the skull? How do you know?
7. Did the skull answer?
8. Why did the skull keep quiet when the hunter came with guards?
9. What happened to Kagwa?
10. After Kagwa died what did the skull say and what was the huntsman’s answer?
11. What are the devices used by the poet to bring the theme to light?
12. What are the characteristics of a ballad? How far does this poem keep to the characteristics of a ballad?

## **The Nightingale and the Rose**

### **Summary**

*The Nightingale and the Rose* is a story about love. A student wanted to find a red rose to give to a girl (Professor’s daughter) so that she would dance with him. But he could not find a red rose at all. A nightingale heard him. The nightingale believed in love and wanted to help the student. She flew from

rose tree to rose tree looking for a red rose. None of the rose trees had red roses. Finally she found a red rose tree, but the cold winter had killed all of the red roses. The rose tree told the nightingale that she could use her blood to give life to one red rose. But the nightingale would die. The nightingale agreed. She pressed her breast into the thorns and her blood flowed into the rose tree. The nightingale sang her last song and died. The next day, the student found the red rose. He was happy. He took it to the girl. But the girl did not want the rose. The student was angry. He threw the red rose on the ground. He thought love was a silly thing. He went back to his room where his books were waiting for him.

- **Read “The Nightingale and the Rose” and answer the questions that follow.**
  1. Why was the Student very upset?
  2. What sort of a person is the Student?
  3. What do red roses usually symbolize?
  4. What does the Nightingale admire about the Student?
  5. What did the Nightingale think about love?
  6. How did “Lizard”, “Butterfly”, and the “Daisy” react when they understood that the Student is crying for a red rose?
  7. What is the secret Nightingale understood? How did the Nightingale react?
  8. To whom did the nightingale go? What happened there?
  9. According to the third Rose tree how could the Nightingale get a red rose?
  10. What is the price for a red rose?
  11. Did the student understand what the Nightingale was telling him? Why?
  12. Who understood what the Nightingale was telling him? Why?
  13. What did the Student think about the Nightingale’s song?
  14. To whom did the Student compare the Nightingale?
  15. Describe the process of producing the red rose.
  16. Was the Professor’s daughter happy when she saw the red rose? How do you know?
  17. What do you understand about the professor’s daughter from her behaviour?
  18. What did the Student do with the rose?
  19. What reasons did the Professor’s daughter give for rejection of his love?
  20. What aspects of love do you find in this story? Describe with examples.
- For further information please refer to E-thaksalawa <http://www.e-thaksalawa.moe.gov.lk>
- You can also log into to YouTube and find several animated versions of the story.

## **Vendor of Sweets**

### **Chapter 1**

- I. Read chapter 1 of the novel.
- II. Find the meanings of unfamiliar words and write them.
- III. Answer the following questions.
  1. Write a paragraph about Jagan as you learnt from chapter 1.
  2. According to Jagan, what is the advice given to people by sages?

3. Introduce the cousin's character.
4. What was Jagan's philosophy as he revealed to cousin?
5. How did Gandhi influence Jagan's life style?
6. How did Jagan make shoes?
7. How did his wife respond his tanning process?
8. How did the cousin express his critical attitude towards Jagan's philosophy and profession?
9. Why did Mr. Nobel frequently visit his home? Why did he feel painful?
10. What are the different aspects of Jagan's character exposed through the following?
  - Sitting on a high chair
  - Use of a very old chair
  - Allowing the beggars to come only on Fridays
  - Counting money without others' notice
  - Reading the lines of the Bhagavad Gita
  - Preparing a new sweet with the leftovers

### Chapter 2

- I. Read chapter 2 of the novel.
- II. Find the meanings of unfamiliar words and write them.
- III. Answer the following questions.
  1. What was the book written by Jagan?
  2. What was Jagan's solution for stopping vagrant's actions?
  3. What do you think about Jagan's solutions?
  4. How was the pedestal of the statue useful for the people?
  5. What were the students discussing near the statue?
  6. What did Jagan feel about his son at this moment?
  7. What was the condition of his bathroom?
  8. What did Jagan use instead of a toothbrush? Why didn't he use a toothbrush?
  9. What made Jagan have immense faith in margosa?
  10. What were the contrasting ideas between Jagan and his wife regarding medicine?

### Chapter 3

- I. Read chapter 3 of the novel.
- II. Find the meanings of unfamiliar words and write them.
- III. Answer the following questions.
  1. Was Jagan a cowardly father? Justify your answer.
  2. How did Jagan have a maternal obsession about his son?
  3. What can you understand about Mali when he talked with Jagan about his cooking?
  4. Why did Jagan become hopeless about Mali's higher education?

5. Why couldn't Jagan continue his education and obtain BA?
6. What was the task given to the cousin by Jagan?
7. What did the cousin reveal about Mali?
8. How did Mali respond Jagan when he questioned about his son's wish to be a writer?
9. How did Jagan respond this situation?
10. What was the cause for the death of Ambika?
11. How did Mali help his mother when she was on sick bed?
12. What was Jagan's philosophy based on Gandhi's teachings?