

NCERT QUESTIONS WITH SOLUTIONS

Thinking About the Poem

1. (i) Find, in the first stanza, three things that cannot happen in a treeless forest.
 (ii) What picture do these words create in your mind: "... sun bury its feet in shadow..."? What could the poet mean by the sun's 'feet'?

- Ans.** (i) Three things that cannot happen in a 'treeless forest' are:
 (a) Birds sitting on the branches of the trees.
 (b) Insects hiding between the leaves and branches of the trees.
 (c) The sun burying its feet in the shadows of the trees in the forest.
 (ii) The words "... sun bury its feet in shadow..." create a visual imagery of sunrays reaching down to the earth and creating patterns of shadows. The sun's 'feet' refers to the rays of sun that reach the earth and the forest.

2. (i) Where are the trees in the poem? What do their roots, their leaves, and their twigs do?
 (ii) What does the poet compare their branches to?

- Ans.** (i) In the poem, the trees are in the poet's house. Their roots work all night to disengage themselves from the cracks in the veranda floor. The leaves make efforts to move towards the glass, while the small twigs get stiff with exertion.
 (ii) The poet compares the long-cramped boughs or branches that shuffle under the roof to patients that have been newly discharged from hospital. The patients are half dazed after having recovered from an illness and move slowly towards the clinic doors longing to be out of the hospital. In a similar way, the branches of the trees are cramped under the closed roof and are longing to get out into the open their natural habitat and spread themselves in the fresh air.



3. (i) How does the poet describe the moon:
 (a) at the beginning of the third stanza, and
 (b) at its end? What causes this change?
 (ii) What happens to the house when the trees move out of it?
 (iii) Why do you think the poet does not mention "the departure of the forest from the house" in her letters? (Could it be that we are often silent about important happenings that are so unexpected that they embarrass us? Think about this again when you answer the next set of questions.)

- Ans.** (i) (a) At the beginning of the third stanza, the poet says that the night is fresh and the whole moon is shining in the open sky.
- (b) At the end, the poet compares the moon shining through the crown of the tallest oak to a mirror that is broken into many pieces such as a shattered mirror. This change is caused by the trees that have made their way from her home to outside. Their branches have risen into the sky, blocking the moon, which is why the moon seems to be broken into many pieces. These pieces can be seen flashing at the top of the tallest oak tree.
- (ii) When the trees move out of the house, it breaks the glass and the smell of the leaves and lichens still reaches the rooms of the house.
- (iii) The poet, like most people, tried hard to recreate the forest in her veranda; however, she then realised that the trees themselves wished to be freed from the captivity of indoor life and badly wanted to go back to their natural habitat. This realisation causes her some embarrassment, as she held them captive against their will; hence she does not mention the departure of forests in her long letters.

4. Now that you have read the poem in detail, we can begin to ask what the poem might mean. Here are two suggestions. Can you think of others?

- (i) Does the poem present a conflict between man and nature? Compare it with 'A Tiger in the Zoo.' Is the poet suggesting that plants and trees, used for 'interior decoration' in cities while forests are cut down, are 'imprisoned', and need to 'break out'?
- (ii) On the other hand, Adrienne Rich has been known to use trees as a metaphor for human beings; this is a recurrent image in her poetry. What new meanings emerge from the poem if you take its trees to be symbolic of this particular meaning?

- Ans.** (i) Yes, the poem presents a conflict between man and nature. While nature is more free and unbounded, man prefers to live in bounded spaces and also wants to curb nature. He uses plants for interior decoration of houses, cuts trees to make a house for himself, kills animals for food or other purposes and cages them in zoos. In all these ways, man curbs nature and denies plants and animals the freedom in which they should live. The poem shows that trees and plants are rebelling against man. They are striving to work their way out into the open. For instance, in the poem 'A Tiger in the Zoo', the poet presents the fact that animals feel bounded by cages. In the poem, 'A Tiger in the Zoo' the poet explains how the tiger is coned to a concrete cage when he should be roaming free in the wild. All he can do is take a few steps in his cage, however he loves to run and leap about in his natural habitat. Both the poets want us to realise that trees, plants, animals are living beings but are bounded by humans.

This signifies the fact that plants and animals feel caged by humans and want to break out from the imprisonment at the hands of humans. They too have feelings and they may long for freedom. We must not imprison them for our amusement; we need to set them free. No matter what facilities we give them in captivity, it will never compensate for the freedom they will experience in their natural habitat.

- (ii) If trees are symbolic of human beings, then it could be said that humans too want to break away from the shackles of the busy and selfish lives they lead. They also want to go out into the nature and be free. They work all day and sometimes all night to try and achieve something though they do not have the time to enjoy it. They keep striving hard in their routines as they feel cramped under the roofs of their homes and offices. Even they want to break free and go out into the peaceful nature.

5. You may read the poem 'On Killing a Tree' by Gieve Patel (Beehive - Textbook in English for Class IX, NCERT). Compare and contrast it with the poem you have just read.

Ans. In the poem 'On Killing a Tree' by Gieve Patel, the poet uses strong images to explain how it is not easy to kill and destroy a tree. Just stabbing, hacking or chopping it with a knife will not do. Only when the roots are pulled out of its source of nourishment and exposed to the elements will one be able to kill the tree. In both the poems, the poets consider the trees as living beings with human qualities. In the poem, 'On Killing a Tree,' the poet uses words like 'bleeding bark', 'heal', 'pain' and 'most sensitive' to personify the trees. The title itself likens the act of killing a tree to murder and brings out the brutality of cutting a tree. Similarly in the poem, 'The Trees' the poet also feels that it is not right for us to keep plants and trees in captivity simply to decorate our homes. They need to be out in the forests i.e. their natural habitat. Both poems convey an environmental message that we need to protect and preserve trees and prevent their destruction. This should be done by planting them, not in our closed homes but out in the open where they can be free with the rest of nature. We should not hurt them as they are also living and too feel pain. Both poems also bring out the fact that we human beings often just stand and watch atrocities committed against trees in silence. We stay aloof, negligent and unaffected by these brutal attacks on nature. The contrast between the two poems is seen in the way they end. In 'The trees', Adrienne Rich describes the trees breaking free and escaping from their captivity to freedom. In the poem, 'On Killing a Tree' however, the helpless tree is finally killed and is unable to escape the brutality of man.