



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR

Class: XII	Department: ENGLISH	2026 – 2027
Question Bank	Topic: KEEPING QUIET – PABLO NERUDA	Note:

Introduction-

The poem “Keeping Quiet” written by Pablo Neruda discusses the need of maintaining peace and silence. He stresses upon being quiet and harmless to the human beings, animals and environment. He suggests that in order to maintain peace and harmony, it is required to stop and introspect ourselves.

Summary-

“Keeping Quiet” is a peace poem written by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. The poet asks humanity to count numbers from one to twelve – twelve being the number of hours shown in a clock or the number of zodiac signs. He requests everyone not to speak because languages create barriers between people. The moment when everyone stops moving their body will be very special and different as we have never experienced such a moment before.

The poet says that in this period of inactivity the fishermen would not harm the whales, the salt gatherers will not hurt their hands, those who are busy destroying the nature will adopt a new approach towards life, The men who are preparing for wars and victory based on deaths of innocent people will join their enemy and stand in unity with them, doing nothing. No one will harm himself or any other person. Everyone will unite and ponder upon his acts and realize the results of his deeds.

The poet clarifies his idea and says further that he does not want that people should stand idle. He wants that there should be no war because he does not want to see trucks laden with dead bodies of the soldiers. He is promoting Universal brotherhood and peace.

The poet says that everyone is working continuously, to achieve one’s goals. People are threatened by death and the fear forces them to work endlessly so that they can achieve everything quickly. In this mad rush, they do not realize the **repercussions** of their acts. He wants us to pause and come out of the mad rush. He wants us to be happy about our achievements and celebrate them. He wants us to overcome the fear of death and to relax for a while. We should know the results of our deeds and celebrate our achievements.

When the people will remain quiet for a while, they will realize the purpose of their lives. Just like all the creations of nature undergo a rebirth with the change of seasons, similarly, keeping quiet will be a rebirth for the human soul. It will give a new meaning to our life. Again, the poet says that he will count till twelve and asks everyone to remain quiet while he leaves.

The poet, Pablo Neruda, advises us to be silent for some time during our busy, frustrated, insecure and selfish life. He promises us lasting peace of mind and endless happiness that we have never experienced in our lives. Keep quiet! This is what he asks us to do.

RTC/ CBQ

Question 1.

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

“Now we will count to twelve
and we will all keep still.
For once on the face of the Earth
let’s not speak in any language,
let’s stop for one second,
and not move our arms so much.”

1. The poet wants us to stay still for.....?
2. What does he hope to achieve by keeping quiet?
3. What does the poet mean by ‘not move our arms so much’?

Answer:

1. The poet wants to count upto twelve and stay still during the time we are counting to twelve.
2. By keeping quiet the poet hopes that he will be able to live a fascinating moment and then realise the value of calm reflection and quiet introspection. The poet believes that by keeping quiet, we will be able to hear the voice of our conscience in these moments of silence.
3. Whenever man has used his arms he has caused undue harm to others. So, the poet uses the phrase, ‘not to move our arms so much’ to emphasise the importance of physical inactivity to lessen destruction caused by man in the world.

Question 2.

“Perhaps the Earth can teach us as when everything seems dead and later proves to be alive.
Now I’ll count up to twelve
and you keep quiet and I will go.”

Questions

- (a)What can the Earth teach us?
- (b)What remains alive when everything seems dead?
- (c)Who is the poet? What does he want to do?
- (d)What does the poet ask us to do?

Answers:

- ‘(a) The earth can teach us a lesson how to live on it.
- (b)Only the earth remains alive when everything seems dead.
- (c) The poet is Pablo Neruda. He wants to count up to twelve.
- (d) He asks us to keep quiet while he is counting up to twelve.

Question 3

What is the exotic moment the poet Pablo Neruda wishes for? (Delhi 2009)

Answer:

Pablo Neruda wishes for that exotic moment when mankind will be free from greed, cruelty and harmful actions. Unnecessary rush and noise have caused unpleasantness and troubles. The poet wishes the noise of engines and machines should cease and peace and tranquillity should prevail.

Question 4.

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow: (Delhi 2010)

It would be an exotic moment
without rush, without engines,
we would all be together
in a sudden strangeness.

1. A moment of silence will lead to
2. Who is the poet speaking to?
3. What would be the moment like?

Answer:

1. A moment of silence can bring about quietness when peace and calmness will prevail.
2. The poet is addressing mankind who has no time for quiet introspection in its over-hectic, busy life.
3. The moment would be exotic and unusual, a new experience in which mankind will experience a sense of bonding and togetherness with each other.

Question 5.

According to the poet, what is it that human beings can learn from Nature?

Answer:

Earth can teach a lesson to mankind on the preservation and resurrection of life and how new life is believed to rise from the ashes of the dead remains. The Earth never attains total inactivity. Nature remains at work under apparent stillness and keeps the Earth alive. Life never ceases on earth when everything appears to be dead only one thing remains alive and that is earth itself.

Question 6.

Why is Pablo Neruda against 'total inactivity'?

Answer:

Pablo Neruda is against 'total inactivity' because that would amount to death and he has no association with death. Life is a continuous and on-going process and so is all about being on the move. Life should not come to a standstill under any circumstance.

Question 7.

Which sadness is Pablo Neruda worried about in his poem?

Answer:

The sadness that Pablo Neruda is worried about in his poem is the sadness of isolation that has made modern man its victim. This sadness has made man self-centered and uncaring to the needs of his fellowmen. He has sacrificed the needs of his emotional self in favour of materialism.

1. Why does the poet want us to keep quiet?
2. What does he want us to do for one second?
3. What does he mean by 'not move our arms'?

Answer:

1. The poet wants us to keep quiet because this moment of quietness will give us the time to meditate and introspect upon the kind of turmoil we have created on earth through our ill-actions. Too much activity and rush has only brought misfortunes to mankind, so it is better to be quiet and still.
2. The poet wants us to do nothing and remain inactive for one second.
3. The phrase 'not move our arms' implies that no physical activity should be carried out for one second. Man has used his arms only to kill and destroy others. Therefore, let him not move his arms to harm others.

Question 8 (Competency based)

A..“If we were not so single-minded

about keeping our lives moving,

and for once could do nothing,

perhaps a huge silence

might interrupt this sadness

of never understanding ourselves

and of threatening ourselves with death.”

1. Assertion - The poet is talking about life

Reason – He does not support inactivity.

- a. Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A
- b. Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A
- c. A is true but R is false
- d. A is false but R is true

2. Assertion- People are single minded.

Reason- They sometimes even take their own lives.

- a. Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A
- b. Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A
- c. A is true but R is false
- d. A is false but R is true

B.

I want no truck/agreement with death.

If we were not single-minded

About keeping our lives moving,

And for once could do nothing, perhaps

A huge silence might interrupt this sadness

Of never understanding ourselves and

Of threatening ourselves with death...

1. Assertion (A): The poet suggests that silence can help reduce sadness.

Reason (R): Silence allows people to reflect and gain clarity about themselves.

- A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
- B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
- C. A is true, but R is false.
- D. A is false, but R is true.

2. Assertion (A): The poet supports the idea of “doing nothing for once.”

Reason (R): Taking a pause can interrupt negative thoughts and emotional distress.

- A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
- B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
- C. A is true, but R is false.
- D. A is false, but R is true.

3. Assertion (A): The poet promotes acceptance of death as a solution to sadness.

Reason (R): He believes thinking about death helps people understand life better.

- A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
- B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A.
- C. A is false, but R is true.
- D. Both A and R are false.

Question 9.

**Now we will count to twelve and we will all keep still.
For once on the face of the Earth let's not speak in any language,
Let's stop for one second, and not move our arms so much.**

1. What is the significance of 'counting to twelve?'

Twelve is an extended counting. While counting for a longer time one feels more relaxed than counting for a short time such as one or three. As the counting is followed by a relaxed time of silent meditation, one needs to keep his mind at ease by counting steadily for a longer time.

2. Why does the poet ask his hearers to stop using any language?

Languages help us to communicate with other people. As the poet wants this time of silence for talking to oneself, not for talking to other people, he doesn't want us to use any language.

3. Why does the poet ask his hearers to make no movements of the arms?

Like any language, movements of arms can also communicate with other people. The poet wants his hearers to stop all sorts of communication with others to achieve a silent meditation and therefore he asks his hearers to stop any movements of the arms.

Question 10.

**It would be an exotic moment without rush, without engines,
We would all be together in a sudden strangeness.**

1. How does the time of silent introspection become an exotic moment for us?

The result of a silent introspection of this kind guarantees a perfect peace of mind. When this peace is achieved through silence, the happiness it provides is equal to no other happiness. It is exotic, strange moment.

2. What does the poet mean by 'rush?'

Rush means the rush that people make to defeat others, to reach before the others reach and the rush for achievements.

3. What sort of 'togetherness' can we experience while keeping quiet?

By keeping quiet we are able to understand our true self and its limitations. We realize how selfish we are and wipe out our ego through meditation. By eliminating a vast world of ego we give room for our brothers and feel a new togetherness.

4. What does the poet mean by the sudden strangeness?

By stopping all activities that one has been doing without pause, one feels a sudden silence and peace of mind which leads to a complete strangeness. When one starts feeling this silence, peace and togetherness, it appears sudden and strange.

Question 11.

**Fisherman in the cold sea would not harm whales
And the man gathering salt would look at his hurt hands...**

1. **What does ‘fisherman’ symbolize?**

Fisherman is a symbol to represent the people of the world, who can rule the people and exploit nature for their own benefits. The poet requests them to stop their atrocities for a while and think about themselves.

2. **Who are represented by the salt gatherers?**

Salt-gatherer is another symbol, representing all the poor/crushed people of the society. His hands are hurt and wounded while collecting salt, ie, working hard to make a living.

3. **What should the salt-gatherer do at the time of silence?**

The salt-gatherer has to look at his miseries and accept his state of being. A life that doesn't accept itself is always sad. He has now time to look at himself and take care of himself.

Question 12.

**Those who prepare green wars, wars with gas, wars with fire,
Victory with no survivors, would put on clean clothes
And walk about with their brothers in the shade, doing nothing.**

1. **What are green wars?**

We use our deadly weapons to kill the mother earth, to destroy our nature and environment. We have poisonous gases and explosives to kill the earth.

2. **Why is victory without survivors?**

Anyone can fight, kill and destroy. Anyone can defeat and be victorious. But no one can enjoy the victory of his wars. It is ironical to have a victory without any survivors.

3. **What does the poet want in the place of wars?**

It is not war we want. We want peace. It is time to hate wars and destruction. It is time to walk peacefully with everyone whom we call enemies.

Question 13.

**What I want should not be confused with total inactivity.
Life is what it is about;**

1. **What confusion, does the poet fear, has been created by him in his readers' mind? Or, What misunderstanding does the poet want to clear?**

The poet at this point fears that his readers might take him wrongly. He makes it very clear that he is not talking about inactivity but activity. He wants his listeners to keep silent and be inactive only for some time.

2. **Explain, ‘life is what it is about.’**

The poet reminds us that life is meaningful only in activity. We are all concerned only about our own lives. Life is an ongoing process and everything and everyone should be moving at all time.

Question 13.

**I want no truck/agreement with death.
If we were not single-minded
About keeping our lives moving,
And for once could do nothing, perhaps
A huge silence might interrupt this sadness
Of never understanding ourselves and
Of threatening ourselves with death...**

1. **What does “truck with death” mean? Why does the poet not want a truck with death?**

Truck with death means an agreement/ association with death. The poet believes that man has a

tendency to get the help of death when he is surrounded by sadness and dullness. Poet doesn't want any agreement with death because he believes that introspection is the right way to get rid of our sadness, not death.

2. **What happens when one is interrupted by silence?**

When one is interrupted by silence, one gets time to introspect and thus get time to kill his ego and all the internal struggles caused by selfishness.

3. **Which are the two prerequisites for achieving the interruption of silence?**

The first prerequisite for achieving the interruption of silence is to keep our single-mindedness away while the other is to do nothing for a while.

4. **When do people threaten themselves with death?**

People tend to threaten themselves with the idea of committing suicide when they find themselves surrounded with sadness and inescapable dullness of mind.

Question 14.

Perhaps the earth can teach us

As when everything seems dead

And later proves to be alive.

Now I will count up to twelve

And you keep quiet and I will go.

1. **What does the earth teach us about the significance of keeping silence?**

The earth is full of examples that approve of the necessity to be silent. Everything keeps silent for some time in order to rejuvenate. Autumn dying in order to come fresh in the Spring season and seeds decaying to give life to a new plant, are examples for this.

2. **What is the importance of the closing lines?**

The poet concludes here. His instructions are completed. Now it is the time to put them in practice. He is going to start counting for his listeners at the end of what they are going to go silent and still. And you keep quiet and I will go. The process will begin soon. We will all keep silent as the poet has asked us to. We will introspect by diving deep into the abyss of our dark minds and find out great happiness that we have never experienced in our lives. We will then accept our limitations like the salt-gatherer, we will then stop harming others, we will finally cease to be selfish.

Short Answer Type Questions (2 Marks, 30-40 words)

1. **Which is the exotic moment that the poet refers to in 'Keeping Quiet'?**

Answer. The poet refers to the moment of stillness and quietness as an exotic moment. It would be an exotic moment, as such a tranquility will initiate peace and brotherhood. There would be no movement, no talk, no activity and consequently, no violence.

2. **What is the sadness that the poet refers to in the poem 'Keeping Quiet'? or**

What is the sadness that the poet refers to in the poem?

Answer. The poet refers to the sadness which surrounds man due to not having any time for himself, the pain of not understanding what he or his fellow human beings want. He has no time for introspection; as a result, he is unable to analyse his own actions and understand its consequences.

3. **Which images in the poem 'Keeping Quiet' show that the poet condemns violence?**

Answer. The images of fishermen not harming the whales in the sea and wars leaving behind no survivors to celebrate the victory show that the poet condemns violence. The poet wants the warmongers to change their blood-stained clothes to clean ones. The poet's refusal to have any association or dealing with death also shows that he is not in favour of any form of violence.

4. What symbol from nature does the poet use to prove that keeping quiet is not total inactivity? (Foreign2018)

Answer. The poet uses nature as a symbol to explain his idea that there can be life under apparent stillness. According to him, keeping quiet is not total inactivity. A seed may appear to be dead and inactive, but one day, the same seed may turn into a fruitful tree.

5. How, according to Neruda, can keeping quiet change our attitude to life? (Compartment 2022)

Answer. Keeping quiet and suspending all our activities for a brief moment will give us time to introspect and analyse our own actions. We will develop a new understanding of our surroundings and thus change our attitude to life. We will check our destructive ways and try to be more positive and constructive.

6. What are the different kinds of wars mentioned in the poem? What is Neruda's attitude towards these wars? (Delhi 2019)

Answer. The poet has written about wars against humanity and nature. Green wars, wars with poisonous gases and wars with fire are the different kinds of wars mentioned in the poem. Wars do good to no one. Pablo Neruda feels that such wars may bring victory, but there are no survivors. It means that there is heavy loss on both sides.

7. How can suspension of activities help? (All India 2022)

Answer. The poet believes that suspension of activities will allow man to introspect, which can help them in analysing their own actions, and in solving many of their problems based on caste, religion or nationality. It will help them develop a new understanding of their surroundings, and thus make them mend their destructive ways.

8. Do you think the poet advocates total inactivity and death?

Answer. No, the poet clearly states that his asking for stillness should not be confused with total inactivity or death. He perceives life to be a continuous process, where man's activities should not lead to destruction of fellow human beings or nature, but should be channelised in a resourceful way.

9. According to the poet, what is it that human beings can learn from nature? (All India 2010)

Answer. Life under apparent stillness in attitude is the thing which man can learn from nature. The Earth is never in a state of total inactivity. Nature carries on its work even where there is stillness all around. Winter is associated with inactivity, but this is not actually true.

10. What will counting up to twelve and keeping quiet help us to achieve?

Answer. The poet asks each one of us to count to twelve and then be quiet, silent and motionless. This quietness will create a moment of togetherness among all; a condition which is foremost for the survival of humanity, which is indeed an achievement. It will also give us One to analyse our actions and their consequences.

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