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CLASS – XI
QB- LABURNUM TOP



LABURNUM TOP

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SUMMARY

The laburnum tree top is silent and motionless. On a September afternoon, the golden sunlight is spread on it. The few leaves left on the tree are turning yellow in autumn. All the seeds have already fallen to the ground.

But the silence is broken with this arrival of a small singing mother bird goldfinch. She has returned to meet and feed her young chicks. It makes a jerky chirping sound from the branch end. The mother's arrival creates a sudden stir and noise that startles the silence spread all around. The little young ones are there in a nest.

The little bird has a smooth and shiny body as that of a lizard. She is extremely watchful and swift. The nest is built securely. The bird enters a thick bunch of leaves and twigs. And at once the tree comes alive like a noisy machine or engine. It is the engine of her little ones. They too start chirruping in excitement. They flap their little wings and put up a confusing noise.

It is the mother bird who creates all such noise to a high pitch. Then having fed her chicks, she flies out of the nest to a branch. Her face bears strips which are its identity marks, a sort of mask on her face.

The purpose of her visit is fulfilled. The bird once again flies away towards some unknown place, far away. Silence as usual returns to the little tree again.

LABURNUM TREE

The laburnum tree stands still and silent in a desolate place. The goldfinch builds her nest on the treetop to raise her family. It is a safe and secure place. The bird goes on long flights to collect food for her chicks. But she returns to her nest regularly. She makes a sound. The chicks recognise the signal. Like some steam engine, they start up a mindless noise. The bird flies up to them, feeds them and then flies away again. The old silence returns to the tree again. The poem has a continuity of atmosphere.

GOLDFINCH

The laburnum tree gets an identity because of the nest built on its top. During the month of September, the tree is left with a few yellowing leaves only. It is visited regularly by the mother goldfinch bird. She comes to feed her young ones. The silence is broken for a while but restored again.

POETIC DEVICE

Alliteration

September sunlight
she stokes
tree trembles and thrills

Simile

sleek as a lizard

Personification

silent, quite still
whole tree trembles

Metaphor

machine
engine

Onomatopoeia

chirrup
chittering
trilling

Symbol

yellow

Transferred Epithet

barred



Rhyming Scheme

The poem is divided into three stanzas. There is no definite rhyme scheme.

- The first stanza describes the tree when it is lifeless.
- The second stanza describes the arrival of the bird.
- The final stanza tells the condition of the tree after the bird has left the tree.

The poem beautifully describes the beauty of nature. It also tries to beautify the solitude of the tree. It also tells how the solitude vanishes when the bird Goldfinch arrives with its family. There is a relationship between all the living beings in the environment, and the need to peacefully coexist can be seen.

There is an interaction between every living creature, which might not be seen or heard by us, but it exists.

The specific literary and poetic devices used in the poem includes:

1. Simile

- **"Then sleek as a lizard, and alert, and abrupt"**
 - *Explanation:* The movement and alertness of the goldfinch are directly compared to a lizard using the word "as".

2. Metaphor

- **"It is the engine of her family"**
 - *Explanation:* The bird is indirectly compared to an engine because she is the source of energy that brings the nestlings to life.
- **"a machine starts up"**
 - *Explanation:* The sudden, loud noise made by the young birds is compared to a starting machine.
- **"Showing her barred face identity mask"**
 - *Explanation:* The bird's distinctive facial markings are indirectly compared to a mask used for identification.

3. Personification

- **"The whole tree trembles and thrills"**
 - *Explanation:* The tree is given the human quality of feeling excited or thrilled when the bird lands on it.

4. Onomatopoeia

- **"chirrup", "chitterings", "trillings"**
 - *Explanation:* Words that imitate or represent the actual sounds made by the goldfinch.

5. Alliteration

- **"September sunlight"**
 - *Explanation:* Repetition of the consonant 'S' sound.
- **"tree trembles"**

- *Explanation:* Repetition of the 'T' sound.

6. Transferred Epithet

- **"her barred face identity mask"**
 - *Explanation:* The attribute of being "barred" is transferred from the bird's feathers to the overall identity mask itself.

7. Imagery

- *Explanation:* The poet creates vivid mental pictures for the reader, such as the "*yellow September sunlight*" and the yellowing leaves of the tree.

Choose the correct option

- The repetition of the colour 'yellow' (sunlight, leaves, flowers) primarily serves to:
 - Highlight the decaying state of the tree in autumn.
 - Create a visual harmony between the bird, the tree, and the season.
 - Symbolize a state of cowardice and impending death.
 - Suggest that the tree is diseased and needs the bird to survive.
- What is the significance of the phrase 'barred face identity mask' in the context of the poem?
 - It suggests the bird is a predator hiding its true intentions.
 - It refers to the bird's natural markings which allow it to be recognized by its young.
 - It implies that the bird is a prisoner of its own maternal instincts.
 - It highlights the bird's role as an actor performing for the tree.
- The simile 'sleek as a lizard' is used to describe the goldfinch to emphasize its:
 - Cold-blooded and predatory nature.
 - Smooth, rapid, and cautious movement into the thickness.
 - Ability to change color and blend into the yellowing leaves.
 - Fragility and small stature compared to the large tree.
- When the poet states 'a machine starts up', he is using a metaphor to describe:
 - The industrial noise of the nearby town.
 - The sudden, coordinated energy and noise of the chicks being fed.
 - The mechanical way in which nature operates without emotion.
 - The literal sound of a tractor working in the September fields.
- The description of the goldfinch as the 'engine of her family' implies that she is:
 - The primary source of energy, life, and sustenance for her young.
 - A loud and disruptive force in the otherwise peaceful forest.
 - Driven by a mechanical instinct rather than maternal love.
 - Responsible for the eventual destruction of the Laburnum tree.
- Which of the following best describes the 'mutualism' depicted between the tree and the bird?
 - The tree provides shelter and a nursery, while the bird provides life and vibrancy.
 - The bird protects the tree from insects, and the tree provides seeds for the bird.
 - The tree uses the bird to spread its fallen seeds to the 'infinite'.
 - The bird uses the tree for rest, while the tree remains indifferent to its presence.

7. The contrast between the beginning and the end of the poem ('silent' vs 'subsides to empty') suggests:

- A) That the bird's visit has permanently changed the tree's nature.
- B) A cyclical return to a state of dormancy and stillness after a burst of life.
- C) That the tree has died because the bird took its energy away.
- D) That the 'infinite' has swallowed the tree's voice.

8. The word 'trembles and thrills' used for the tree indicates:

- A) Fear of the sudden 'startlement' caused by the bird.
- B) The physical and emotional resonance of life and activity within it.
- C) The instability of the tree's branches during an autumn storm.
- D) The tree's excitement at the prospect of its seeds falling.

9. What does the 'infinite' most likely represent when the goldfinch 'launches away'?

- A) The vast, blue sky that offers freedom and a wider perspective.
- B) The certainty of death that awaits all living creatures.
- C) The migration path to a specific southern destination.
- D) The emptiness of the tree once the 'engine' has departed.

10. The poem's structure, moving from stillness to intense activity and back to stillness, mirrors:

- A) The life cycle of a leaf from green to yellow.
- B) The transient nature of moments of joy and vitality in life.
- C) The poet's own struggle to find inspiration in nature.
- D) The mechanical rhythm of a factory starting and stopping.

Answers: -

1. **B) Create a visual harmony between the bird, the tree, and the season.** *Rationale:* The yellow goldfinch, yellow leaves, and yellow sunlight unify the elements of the poem into a single aesthetic and thematic whole.
2. **B) It refers to the bird's natural markings which allow it to be recognized by its young.** *Rationale:* The 'mask' is her specific marking that serves as an 'identity' badge for her family within the thicket.
3. **B) Smooth, rapid, and cautious movement into the thickness.** *Rationale:* Lizards are known for being 'alert and abrupt,' which matches the bird's careful but quick entry to avoid predators.
4. **B) The sudden, coordinated energy and noise of the chicks being fed.**
Rationale: The 'machine' is a metaphor for the collective life and noise of the brood that 'starts up' upon the mother's arrival.
5. A) The primary source of energy, life, and sustenance for her young.
Rationale: An engine drives a machine; the mother bird drives the survival and activity of her family unit.
6. A) The tree provides shelter and a nursery, while the bird provides life and vibrancy.
Rationale: The relationship is symbiotic; the tree hosts the life, and the bird transforms the tree from a silent object to a living entity.
7. B) A cyclical return to a state of dormancy and stillness after a burst of life.
Rationale: The poem is structured as a loop, showing that life's intensities are transient and always return to quietude.
8. B) The physical and emotional resonance of life and activity within it.

Rationale: The tree 'trembles' because it is physically moved by the birds and metaphorically 'thrilled' by the presence of life.

9. A) The vast, blue sky that offers freedom and a wider perspective.

Rationale: In the context of flight, 'the infinite' represents the boundless sky into which the bird disappears.

10. B) The transient nature of moments of joy and vitality in life.

Rationale: The movement from silence to noise and back to silence reflects how bursts of energy and life are temporary.

Assertion and Reason Based

Q1: Assertion: The Laburnum tree becomes calmer when the goldfinch rises towards heaven.

Reason: The goldfinch's departure marks the end of the poem's excitement.

- (a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (c) Assertion is true, but the reason is false.
- (d) Assertion is false, but the reason is true.

Ans: (a)

Both the assertion and reason are true. The departure of the goldfinch indeed marks the end of excitement in the poem, and this is the correct explanation for why the tree becomes calmer. Thus, option A is correct.

Q2: Assertion: The goldfinch's chirping sounds break the silence in the poem.

Reason: The poem takes place in the middle of the night.

- (a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (c) Assertion is true, but the reason is false.
- (d) Assertion is false, but the reason is true.

Ans: (b)

Both the assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion. The assertion is correct, as the goldfinch's chirping disrupts the initial silence. However, the reason is not relevant because the time of day is not specified in the poem. Thus, option B is correct.

Q3: Assertion: The goldfinch enters the Laburnum tree smoothly like a lizard.

Reason: Lizards are common birds that often nest in trees.

- (a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (c) Assertion is true, but the reason is false.
- (d) Assertion is false, but the reason is true.

Ans: (c)

The assertion is true, as the poem describes the goldfinch's smooth entry into the tree. However, the reason is false, as lizards are not birds; they are reptiles. Therefore, option C is correct.

4. Assertion (A): The laburnum tree was silent and still in the September afternoon sunlight.

Reason (R): The tree is entirely lifeless, stripped of its leaves, and unable to support life.

Options:

- (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.

Answer: (c) A is true, but R is false.

Explanation: The tree is silent and still at the beginning, but it is not entirely lifeless. It provides shelter and serves as a nursery for the goldfinch

5. Assertion (A): The goldfinch's entry into the thick leaves is compared to the movement of a lizard.

Reason (R): The comparison highlights the bird's sleek, sudden, and alert movements to evade predators.

Options:

- (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.

Answer: (a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.

6. Assertion (A): The goldfinch is described as the "engine of her family".

Reason (R): Her arrival triggers a sudden burst of chirping, wing-fluttering, and trilling from her hidden chicks.

Options:

- (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.

Answer: (a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.

7. Assertion (A): The laburnum tree undergoes a temporary transformation upon the bird's arrival.

Reason (R): The tree trembles and thrills with the activity of the bird and her young, acting as a machine.

Options:

- (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.

Answer: (a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A

8. Assertion (A): The poem ends with the tree subsiding to emptiness.

Reason (R): The goldfinch departs to the vast sky, leaving the tree empty and quiet once again.

Options:

- (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.

Answer: (a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.

EXTRACT BASED QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

Extract 1

*"The Laburnum top is silent, quite still
In the afternoon yellow September sunlight,
A few leaves yellowing, all its seeds fallen."*

1. What does the term "Laburnum top" refer to here?

- A) The peak of a mountain
- B) The uppermost branches of the Laburnum tree
- C) A bird's nest built on the ground
- D) The golden sky above the tree

2. What is the condition of the tree in the extract?

- A) It is blooming with flowers and fresh seeds
- B) It is being cut down by woodcutters
- C) It is quiet, still, and losing its yellow leaves
- D) It is being attacked by pests

3. Which season is referenced by the phrase "September sunlight"?

- A) Spring
- B) Winter
- C) Summer
- D) Autumn

4. What does the word "yellow" symbolize in these lines?

- A) Fear and danger
- B) Decay, autumn, and the fading of life
- C) Happiness and joy
- D) Royal abundance

Answers for Extract 1:

- 1. B) The uppermost branches of the Laburnum tree
- 2. C) It is quiet, still, and losing its yellow leaves
- 3. D) Autumn
- 4. B) Decay, autumn, and the fading of life

Extract 2

*"Then sleek as a lizard, and alert, and abrupt,
She enters the thickness, and a machine starts up.
Of chitterings and a tremor of wings, and trillings
The whole tree trembles and thrills."*

1. Which literary device is used in the first line, "Sleek as a lizard"?

- A) Metaphor
- B) Personification
- C) Simile
- D) Alliteration

2. What is meant by the phrase "machine starts up"?

- A) The sudden activation of a mechanical engine
- B) The abrupt noise and activity of the baby birds upon their mother's arrival
- C) The bird's wings flapping mechanically
- D) The wind blowing through the branches

3. How does the goldfinch move when she arrives at the tree?

- A) Slowly and loudly
- B) Sleek, alert, and abruptly
- C) Hesitant and frightened
- D) Heavy and clumsy

4. Which of the following words from the extract represents sound?

- A) Sleek
- B) Trembles
- C) Thickness
- D) Chitterings

Answers for Extract 2:

1. C) Simile
2. B) The abrupt noise and activity of the baby birds upon their mother's arrival
3. B) Sleek, alert, and abruptly
4. D) Chitterings

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

Q1. How is the laburnum tree described at the beginning of the poem?

Answer: The laburnum tree is described as completely silent and still in the afternoon yellow September sunlight. Its leaves have started turning yellow, and all its seeds have fallen to the ground.

Q2. What happens to the tree when the goldfinch arrives?

Answer: The arrival of the goldfinch brings a sudden burst of life, noise, and movement. The tree comes alive with chittering, chirping, and the trembling of wings, transforming it into a lively engine.

Q3. To what is the bird's movement compared, and why?

Answer: The bird's movement is compared to a lizard's—sleek, alert, and abrupt. This comparison is used because, like a lizard, the bird is extremely swift and cautious to avoid drawing the attention of predators.

Q4. What is the "machine" that starts up in the tree?

Answer: The "machine" refers to the bird's family (its chicks). Upon the mother's arrival, the chicks start chirping and fluttering, creating a loud, engine-like noise that energizes the entire tree.

Q5. What does the phrase "her barred face identity mask" mean?

Answer: This phrase refers to the bird's unique facial markings or striped plumage. These dark stripes across her face act like a mask, serving as a visual mark of identity for her chicks to recognize her.

Q6. What happens to the laburnum tree after the goldfinch leaves?

Answer: After feeding her young, the goldfinch flies away into the infinite sky. The laburnum tree immediately "subsides to empty," returning to its original state of quietness and stillness.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

Q1. How does the poem 'The Laburnum Top' symbolize the journey of life and the concept of change?

Answer: The poem beautifully captures the cyclical nature of life. The laburnum tree symbolizes a mundane, lifeless state when it is still, silent, and shedding its leaves. The sudden arrival of the goldfinch introduces vibrant energy and motion, much like a sudden spark of joy or purpose in life. However, this period of feverish activity is only temporary. Once the bird leaves, the tree reverts to its original silence and emptiness. This mirrors the reality that change is the only constant in life; excitement, activity, and life itself are transient phases.

Q2. Describe the transformation of the laburnum tree upon the arrival of the goldfinch.

Answer: Before the goldfinch arrives, the laburnum tree is completely silent, still, and devoid of life, with yellowing leaves and fallen seeds. The moment the bird arrives, the atmosphere

changes drastically. The goldfinch enters with a "twitching chirrup" and moves like a lizard, sleek and alert, to her nest. Her young ones in the nest immediately start chirping and fluttering, creating a loud noise, or "chittering". The poet compares this sudden burst of energy to the starting of an engine, transforming the quiet tree into a place filled with power, movement, and musical excitement.

Q3. Evaluate the significance of the title "The Laburnum Top" and how it ties into the central theme of the poem.

Answer: The title "The Laburnum Top" is highly significant because it pinpoints the exact location where all the action takes place—the very top branch of the tree. The laburnum tree itself acts as a canvas. It is initially described as lifeless and desolate, reflecting themes of dullness and loneliness. The title draws focus to how this uppermost part of the tree becomes the stage for a dramatic transformation when the goldfinch arrives. It centralizes the contrast between stillness and vitality, showing how a mundane existence can suddenly erupt with life and energy.

Q4. Bring out the essence of the relationship between the mother goldfinch and her young ones based on the poem.

Answer: The poem deeply portrays the unconditional bond and maternal instinct of the goldfinch. The mother bird returns to the tree with a sleek, alert movement to feed her hidden family without drawing the attention of predators. Her arrival brings immense joy and sustenance to her chicks, who erupt into a chorus of excitement upon hearing her. After feeding them and ensuring their safety, the mother prepares to leave, launching away toward the infinite sky. This highlights her role as a protector and provider, showcasing the selfless nature of maternal love.