

CBSE Class 12 English Core
NCERT Solutions
Poem 2
An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum

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1. Have you ever visited or seen an elementary school in a slum? What does it look like?

Answer: Yes, I have visited an elementary school in a slum. The school was in a pitiful state. Its dingy and neglected classrooms were devoid of even basic amenities like fans and lights. Every single window was broken and bore marks of rust. How the students in the classroom dealt with the outside noise or the winters was anybody's guess. The ceilings too were full of cobwebs. The furniture was broken and almost unusable. The walls of the classrooms were as shabby, malnourished and disinterested as the students sitting in their enclosures. Even the teachers seemed to have lost their concern both for the students and their education. Moreover, I was shocked to know that the usage of toilets was restricted to the school staff.

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1. Tick the item which best answers the following.

(a) The tall girl with her head weighed down means the girl _____.

- (i) is ill and exhausted**
- (ii) has her head bent with shame**
- (iii) has untidy hair**

(b) The paper-seeming boy with rat's eyes means the boy is _____.

- (i) sly and secretive**
- (ii) thin, hungry and weak**
- (iii) unpleasant looking**

(c) The stunted, unlucky heir of twisted bones means the boy _____.

- (i) has an inherited disability**
- (ii) was short and bony**

(d) His eyes live in a dream. A squirrel's game, in the tree room other than this. This means the boy is _____.

- (i) full of hope in the future
- (ii) mentally ill
- (iii) distracted from the lesson

(e) The children's faces are compared to 'rootless weeds'. This means they _____.

- (i) are insecure
- (ii) are ill-fed
- (iii) are wasters

Answer: (a) (ii) is ill and exhausted

(b) (ii) sly and secretive

(c) (i) has an inherited disability

(d) (iii) distracted from the lesson

(e) (iii) are wasters

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2. What do you think is the colour of 'sour cream'? Why do you think the poet has used this expression to describe the classroom walls?

Answer: Sour cream indicates the cream colour or dirty white. The poet has used this expression to describe the poor dull and ill-equipped environment of the classroom. The walls were painted long ago by donations and since then no attention has been paid to them. We are told about the neglect these children face. It adds to the dull ambience.

3. The walls of the classroom are decorated with the pictures of 'Shakespeare', 'buildings with domes', 'world maps' and beautiful valleys. How do these contrast with the world of these children?

Answer: All these totally contrast with the world of the children in the slum. They get half education. The value of education for the children is minimal and to have these pictures which are symbols of high quality education is incongruous here. The buildings with domes are examples of a civilised world, the world unknown to them. The world map is irrelevant to them because the slums, their world cannot be located there. Finally, the beautiful valley

with rivers and capes is meaningless to them. With a surrounding deprived of Natural beauty they can only watch the polluted sky through the broken window panes.

4. What does the poet want for the children of the slums? How can their lives be made to change?

Answer: He wants the children of the slums to venture into the outside world, beyond the boundaries of their slums, and experience a better life that can ascertain the facts about their present status and the future too.

The elementary school in the slum does not serve any purpose with its poor infrastructure and disinterested students. The poet feels that the governor, inspector and visitors should take initiative to bring about a real change in their situation. To ensure a better way of living for them, they need to be given proper education and freedom from their present confines. They need opportunity and encouragement to be able to live life with purpose and zest.