

CBSE Class 12 English Core
NCERT Solutions
Poem 6
Aunt Jennifer's Tigers

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1. What does the title of the poem suggest to you? Are you reminded of other poems on tigers?

Answer: The title, "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers", suggests that the poem is about Aunt Jennifer's knitted tigers that, with their chivalric, ferocious, bright and carefree attitude, become an alternate world of her creation. The tigers are the only means of freedom in her life, which is otherwise burdened by fear and struggles of the married life. The poet highlights the suppressed desire of a woman that finds way to express her feelings of liberation in the shapes of tigers. She beholds herself as a tiger with tremendous strength, but is unable to exercise it due to male chauvenism.

There are many other poems written about tigers. A few of them are mentioned below.

"The Tiger" by William Blake

"Tiger" by Alec Derwent Hope

"Tiger Drinking at Forest Pool" by Ruth Sophia Padel

Page No: 104 Think it Out

1. How do 'denizens' and 'chivalric' add to our understanding of the tiger's attitudes?

Answer: Like all beasts of prey, the tigers are the denizens of forest. They live far away from human settlements. They are called 'chivalric.' This indicates the majestic and honourable position that they occupy in the world of animals. So the use of the words 'denizens' and 'chivalric' adds to our understanding of the tigers' attitudes.

2. Why do you think Aunt Jennifer's hands are 'fluttering through her wool' in the second stanza? Why is she finding the needle so hard to pull?

Answer: Aunt Jennifer's hands are 'fluttering through her wool' because she is an old lady on whom age has taken its toll. The fluttering of Aunt Jennifer's fingers also signifies her oppressed mental condition which makes it difficult for her to even pull an ivory needle

while embroidering.

3. What is suggested by the image 'massive weight of Uncle's wedding band'?

Answer: The 'wedding band' that the poet talks about was the wedding ring worn by Aunt Jennifer. The image 'massive weight of Uncle's wedding band' suggests that she was overburdened with duties and responsibilities, post her marriage.

4. Of what or of whom is Aunt Jennifer terrified with in the third stanza?

Answer: Even after death, Aunt would carry her fear of her domineering husband as she would yet bear the burden of the wedding band on her finger. The ordeals faced by her in an oppressive marriage would continue to terrify her.

5. What are the 'ordeals' Aunt Jennifer is surrounded by? Why is it significant that the poet uses the word 'ringed'? What are the meanings of the word 'ringed' in the poem?

Answer: Aunt Jennifer has been living her life in accordance with the rules laid down by her husband. Her life lacks independence and is overburdened by the demands and duties of her married life. Although old and weak, she still has to face oppression by her husband. These are the ordeals that the poet talks about.

The use of word 'ringed', in the poem, is significant and appropriate because it correctly represents the vicious circle from which Aunt Jennifer is unable to free herself. The word 'ringed' not only indicates that she is wearing her wedding ring but also that she is bound by the responsibilities, fear and oppression of her marriage for entire life and, probably, after it too.

6. Why do you think Aunt Jennifer created animals that are so different from her own character?

What might the poet be suggesting, through this difference?

Answer: The timid and fearful Aunt Jennifer creates an alternative world of free and fearless tigers to express her longing for freedom, a medium of escape from her grim marriage. The ironical contrast underscores a warning by the poet against acceptance of subjugation by women as it crushes their dreams, individuality and a full life.

7. Interpret the symbols found in this poem.

Answer: Wedding band is a symbol of oppression in an unhappy marriage. Marriage is a social and legal binding, making women silently accept their subjugation and male

domination, especially in a patriarchal society. Its weight refers to the burden of the husband's expectations. Ringed means encircled or trapped, losing individuality and freedom.

Aunt Jennifer is a typical victim of male oppression in an unhappy marriage, who suffers loss of individuality, dignity and personal freedom silently. She becomes dependent, fearful and frail.

Tigers symbolize untamed free spirit. Here they are antithesis of their creator's personality. The use of colours implies that Aunt Jennifer's tigers and their land are more vital and they enjoy a sense of freedom far greater than hers. Yellow (bright topaz) connotes the sun and fierce energy, while green reminds one of spring and vitality.

They pace and prance freely, proudly, fearless, confident and majestic in their bearing. Embroidery is a symbol of creative expression. The artwork expresses the Aunt's suppressed desires and becomes her escape from the oppressive reality of her life.

Aunt in the last stanza shows that she has lost her identity completely, thus lost even her name after her death.

8. Do you sympathise with Aunt Jennifer? What is the attitude of the speaker towards Aunt Jennifer?

Answer: Yes, the character of Aunt Jennifer wins our sympathy as a reader. Her ordeals and sufferings move the reader. Even the speaker in the poem shows sympathy and pity towards her. The speaker says that even after Aunt Jennifer's death, she will be terrified of her husband and the ordeals of her marriage with a suppressed desire to be free.