



BAL BHARATI PUBLIC SCHOOL, PITAMPURA, DELHI - 110034

SUBJECT:-ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Class- X

THE BALL POEM
BY JOHN BERRYMAN



JOHN BERRYMAN

ABOUT THE POET

John Berryman was an American poet and a scholar. He is best known for the Dream Songs (1969) which was a sequence of 385 poems. He won Pulitzer Prize for the dream songs. He also won National book award.

THE BALL POEM

What is the boy now, who has lost his ball.
What, what is he to do? I saw it go
Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then
Merrily over—there it is in the water!
No use to say 'O there are other balls':

An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy
As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down
All his young days into the harbour where
His ball went. I would not intrude on him,
A dime, another ball, is worthless. Now
He senses first responsibility
In a world of possessions. People will take balls,
Balls will be lost always, little boy,
And no one buys a ball back. Money is external.
He is learning, well behind his desperate eyes,
The epistemology of loss, how to stand up
Knowing what every man must one day know
And most know many days, how to stand up
And gradually light returns to the street,
A whistle blows, the ball is out of sight.
Soon part of me will explore the deep and dark
Floor of the harbour . . I am everywhere,
I suffer and move, my mind and my heart move
With all that move me, under the water
Or whistling, I am not a little boy.

OBJECTIVES

- To make the students learn about the loss of something they love.
- To make them develop the ability to understand the difficult situations in their life.
- To help them not to grieve but to experience new things over the loss of something.
- To help them cope with the problems of life.
- To help them use new words in their own language.

SUMMARY

The poet is talking about a little boy who lost his ball while he was playing with it. The ball slipped from his hand and went into the nearby water body. The poet says that this sight of the boy losing his favourite ball made him think about the boy and his reaction to this situation. He further says that the boy was helplessly looking into the water where his ball had gone. He was sad and was trembling with fear. He got so immersed in his sorrow that he kept standing near the harbour for a very long time and kept on looking for his ball. The poet says that he could console him by saying that he may get a new ball or he could also give him some money to buy another ball. But he stops himself from doing so because he thinks that the money may bring a new ball but will not bring the memories and feelings attached to the lost ball. He further says that the time has come for the boy to learn his responsibilities. Here the poet wants to say that now the boy will learn the toughest lesson of life. The lesson of accepting the harsh realities of life that one day we may lose what we love the most.

SYMBOLIC MEANING

In this poem, the boy's ball signifies his young and happy days of innocence. In this world, people will take away the balls just as they will take away our innocence and force us to grow up. And once we lose this innocence, we can never get it back. This poem goes to show how, all throughout your life, you will be forced to do things that you don't want to do; and you will lose or have to give up the things that you love. But, despite this, you have to learn to stand up - to be strong and get on with your life - no matter how much it hurts inside because that is the only way you can survive. One has to learn to accept and let go - and not cling onto something that he can never have.

The poet uses imagery when describing how the ball personifies the spirit of the boy's childish innocence. In the last five lines, we visualize how the spirit of this little boy, like the ball, is sinking into the dark waters of the harbour. As it drifts further away, the boy learns to grow up, and that part of him that is linked to that ball grows up as well, until he is no longer a little boy.

There is no specific rhyme scheme but the poet instead conveys his meaning through the rhythm, the tone, and his use of words. For example, in the lines *'I saw it go merrily bouncing, down the street, and then merrily over'* the short, brisk, happy words allow you to visualize a ball bouncing along. In the lines *'An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy as he stands rigid, trembling, staring down all his young days into the harbour, where his ball went.'* The words as well as the rhythm is tragic, dramatic and harsh, which is suitable for the situation. Similarly the use of tone and rhythm help in adding to the effect of the poem, and emphasize the deeper meaning.

POETIC DEVICES

Symbolism : Balls will be lost always

Alliteration : Repetition of sound 'b' at the start of the words (buys a ball back)

Assonance : Repetition of sound of the vowel 'o' (boy, now, who, lost)

Imagery: When the poet says merrily bouncing down the street.

Repetition: The word 'balls' is repeated

LINK FOR
VIDEO

https://www.diksha.gov.in/cbse/play/collection/do_312796455301447680117634?contentType=TextBook

ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS :

1. Why does the poet say, "I would not intrude on him"? Why doesn't he offer him money to buy another ball?
2. "... staring down/All his young days into the harbour where/His ball went ..." Do you think the boy has had the ball for a long time? Is it linked to the memories of the days when he played with it?
3. Bring out the theme of the poem.
4. Does the poem symbolise something? Elucidate with examples.
5. 'Money is external.' What does the poet mean by this expression?

REFERENCE TO THE CONTEXT :

Read the following stanza and answer the questions that follow:

I. 'No use to say 'O there are other balls':

An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy
As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down
All his young days into the harbour where
His ball went.'

- a) Bring out the significance of the ball for the boy.
- b) What is the impact of losing the ball on the boy?
- c) Where is he staring now?
- d) Where have 'his young days' gone?

II. 'I would not intrude on him;

A dime, another ball, is worthless. Now
He senses first responsibility
In a world of possessions'

- a) Who is 'I' in these lines?
- b) What is the cost of the ball?
- c) What does the poet mean by 'a world of possessions'?
- d) Give the adjective form of 'responsibility'.

III. 'He is learning ,well behind his desperate eyes,

The epistemology of loss, how to stand up
Knowing what every man must one day know
And most know many days, how to stand up.'

- a) Explain the phrase--'his desperate eyes'.
- b) What does the poet mean by 'epistemology of loss'.
- c) What must a man know one day?
- d) What lesson is the boy taught here?

VOCABULARY EXERCISE :

Arid	terrifying	perplexing	filthy	profound	luminous
Soaring	amiable	exasperating	cautious	vibrant	rare
Captivating	obese	hilarious	conservative	alarming	
Congested	overjoyed	deafening			

The words given in the box above can be used to substitute the words given below. Match the words given below with the most suitable word from the box above :

- 1.very dry
- 2.very dirty
- 3.very deep
- 4.very fat
- 5.very friendly
- 6.very frightening
- 7.very funny
- 8.very glad
- 9.very hard to find
- 10.very high
- 11.very interesting
- 12.very loud
- 13.very confused
- 14.very old fashioned
- 15.very frightening
- 16.very crowded
- 17.very annoying
- 18.very bright
- 19.very careful
- 20.very colourful

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