

The Last Lesson of The Afternoon

Summary

The Last Lesson of the Afternoon by David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930) expresses a mood of bitter desperation and disappointment at the lack of gratitude for a teacher's work. The poet, who also happens a teacher, compares his students to hounds because they hate chasing knowledge. The teacher tried hard to motivate the students to learn, but he could not inspire them to learn. He feels that his teaching and the learning of the students are both useless because he can no longer haul them and urge them.

The poet describes very strongly what he feels and the inner turmoil he suffers. Finally, he thinks he won't waste his soul and strength in teaching those students who show so much indifference to the study.

Thinking about the poem

Q1. What is the tone in the opening line of the poem?

Ans: The poem, in the opening line, contains a tone of bitter desperation and disappointment at the thanklessness of a teacher's work. His students are not interested in the quest or 'hunt' for knowledge and are unruly in their behaviour.

Q2. Who is the speaker of the poem?

Ans: The poet who also happened to be a teacher is the speaker of the poem.

Q3. What are the pupils regarded as? Why has the teacher failed to ' haul them and urge them' any more?

Ans: The pupils are regarded as uncontrolled hunting dogs(unruly hounds). The teacher has failed to haul them or urge them any more because the pupils have no

interest in learning. One can take a horse to the river but twenty can not make him drink.

Q4. Which words or phrases in stanza 2 convey the mood of the speaker?

Ans: The speaker is feeling angry, impatient and desperate in stanza 2. The expressions that convey the mood of the speaker are:

No longer now can I endure.....

I am sick.....

What on earth is good of it all?

What good to them (his students) or me, I cannot see.

Q5. Why doesn't the speaker want to consume his fuel anymore?

Ans: The speaker does not want to waste the last dear fuel (energy) of his life anymore because he feels that it is mere wastage of time and energy to teach knowledge to the students who hate to chase knowledge.

Q6. What do you think 'take the toll of their punishment 'means?

Ans. This means that he has sunk to the very lowest point of his life, and cannot sink any further or take this kind of life anymore. He has attempted his level best to mould the students but in turn, he does not gain any positive results. Hence he feels insulted. He feels that he has been rewarded with punishment(their slovenly work). He decides here that he will not take this any longer.

Q7. Why does the teacher feel that his teaching and the pupils' learning are both purposeless? Pick out words and phrases which show that he shares his pupils' indifference to their work.

Ans: The teacher feels that his teaching and the pupils' learning are both purposeless because in spite of hard efforts to teach knowledge to the students he

has failed to obtain any positive outcomes from them. Here are some words and phrases showing that he shares his pupils' indifference to their work:

i) 'I will not!' 'I will not waste my soul...' 'I do not and will not...

ii) 'It all goes down the same abyss.'

Q8. Do you find any connection between the beginning and the ending of the poem?

Ans: There is a well-knit connection between the beginning and the ending of the poem. In the beginning, the teacher has been shown a pessimist who does not want to teach his students because they are unwilling to learn. But in the middle, he becomes a little optimistic and wants to utilize his energy to teach them. But again at the end, he gets a negative response from them and becomes pessimistic again. His final resolve is to sit it out, wait for the bell, and not drain his strength but keep it to live for his own life. He has given up trying.

Q9. After reading the poem, write an account of your opinion (idea of 100-200 words) about the poem.

Ans. The poem is an account of a teacher's feelings when he is supposed to teach indisciplined and disinterested students. It is the duty and obligation of a teacher to inspire his students and give them knowledge. He has to enlighten them with the power of knowledge. He has to provoke them to pursue knowledge and develop interest in studies. But this poem proves to be misleading because the said teacher is determined to sit idle in his class and waste the precious time of his students rather than inspiring them to gain education. He uses rude words for his students like unruly hounds which is not a feature of a dedicated teacher. No doubt, the teacher thinks of using his efforts to teach them and cast away their indifference, but without applying any effort decides not to work on them. He believes that all his teaching and their learning is purposeless. This again is a wrong perception because a teacher has to try his best to work on his students and it is obvious that hard work never goes waste. The teacher is totally uncared about the literacy of his students. He does not care whether his students are able to write

any simple and easy composition. It depicts that he is not sincere to his cause and is degrading the status of a teacher. Finally, the teacher has developed his own theory that he does not and will not teach as his students do not and will not obey and listen to his teachings. This has totally degraded a teacher student relation. When a teacher decides not to share or bestow his knowledge to his students and students decide not to grab the precious knowledge, then the earth is certain to revolve back to antique world when humans had no demarcation from beasts. The younger generation is certain to become arrogant, immoral, indisciplined and inhuman by this kind of ideology of a teacher.

Learning About the Literary Devices:

Q : What is the metaphor used by the poet in the stanza 1?

Ans: The metaphor used by the poet in stanza 1 is 'My pack of unruly hounds. It is used to depict his indisciplined and uncontrollable students.

Q: Identify the metaphor in stanza 3.

Ans. The metaphor in stanza 3 is 'My last dear fuel of life. It is used to depict the energy or knowledge of a teacher.