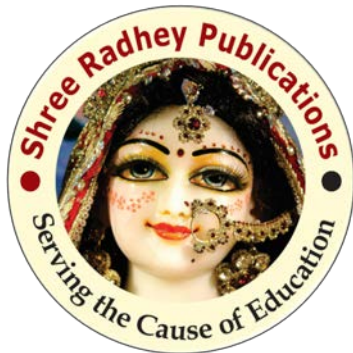


Keeping Quiet

By Pablo Neruda



PPTs from the Divine Book
English XII (Core)

By Subhash Dey

ABOUT THE POET



Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) is the pen name of Neftali Ricardo Reyes Basoalto who was born in the town of Parral in Chile. Neruda's poems are full of easily understood images which make them no less beautiful. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 1971. In this poem Neruda talks about the necessity of quiet introspection and creating a feeling of mutual understanding among human beings.



Now we will count to twelve and we will all keep still. For once on the face of the Earth let's not speak in any language, let's stop for one second, and not move our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment without rush, without engines, we would all be together in a sudden strangeness. Fishermen in the cold sea would not harm whales and the man gathering salt would look at his hurt hands.

Those who prepare green wars, wars with gas, wars with fire, victory with no survivors, would put on clean clothes and walk about with their brothers in the shade, doing nothing.

What I want should not be confused with total inactivity. Life is what it is about; I want no truck with death. If we were not so single-minded about keeping our lives moving, and for once could do nothing, perhaps a huge silence might interrupt this sadness of never understanding ourselves and of threatening ourselves with death.

Perhaps the Earth can teach us as when everything seems dead and later proves to be alive. Now I'll count up to twelve and you keep quiet and I will go.



Word Meaning

exotic moment: unusual and interesting moment – the moment of silence/stillness when all activity will come to a standstill; people will create a feeling of mutual understanding, brotherhood & love.	engines: machines/automobiles/factories etc.	green wars: wars against the environment/nature
wars with gas, wars with fire: wars using gas or fire (guns) – nuclear wars	total inactivity: complete stillness/no movement/death	no truck with: not to associate or deal with



Theme

"Universal peace and tranquillity"

This poem is about the necessity of quiet introspection and creating a feeling of mutual understanding among human beings. In the present day, where people have fast lives, people are least concerned about their inner selves. Man has reached a stage where he needs to find the cause of sadness. Life has therefore become all about wars and misunderstandings. The poet advises his readers to break free of this mundane life by self-introspection. He appeals to the modern day man to stop unwanted and mindless activity in order to bond with people around the globe.



Message & Lessons

Live in peace and brotherhood, and maintaining harmony with nature/earth.

The poem teaches us (all human beings of the world):

- Value of keeping quiet and importance of self-introspection
- Quietness leading to stillness, and peace and calmness in the world
- How to stop destruction and how to bring about cessation of wars
- Inter-connectedness of human beings
- To live in peace and brotherhood
- To live by maintaining harmony with earth



Poetic Devices/Figures of Speech

Personification	"face of the earth"
Hyperbole	"victory with no survivors"
Metaphor	"...would put on clean clothes And walk about with their brothers in the shade..."
Repetition	"Let's not speak in any language, let's stop for a second." "Wars with gas; wars with fire"
Alliteration	"his hurt hands"
Irony	"Wars with gas; wars with fire Victory with no survivors"
Euphemism	"no truck with death"
Synecdoche	"not move our arms so much"
Contrasting imagery	"wars / walk about with their brothers in shade"



Synopsis

Detailed Summary

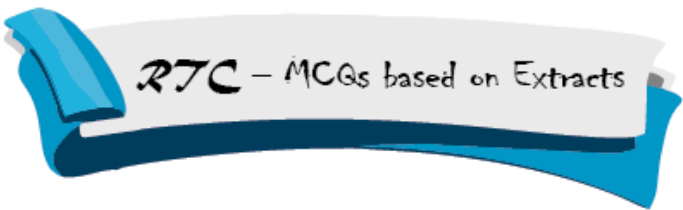
Counting up to twelve and keeping still will help us achieve a productive silence, which will give us time for introspection, for evaluating our follies. The moment of silence would be exotic. Man would get an opportunity to realise how he is destroying the nature and how he is harming himself. It will give us an opportunity to understand each other and save ourselves from destruction and death. It will create a feeling of mutual understanding among human beings and promote universal brotherhood. All activities against nature will stop – no whale hunting, no salt gathering, no wars against environment, no wars using gas or fire (guns).

Neruda does not want people to talk in aggressive tones or raise their arms. He also appealed to fishermen to stop harming whales and war mongers (i.e. power hungry people, politicians, scientists, army, etc.) to shun aggression and maintain peace. These futile wars will provide a victory with no survivors. It means no one will be left to celebrate it. So, the war mongers should change their attitude from war to peace, from negative to positive, and to cleanse their mind of malicious feelings like hatred, jealousy, etc. They should walk together, spreading the message of brotherhood and love.

Neruda does not advocate total inactivity and death. He feels that peace and tranquillity should not be confused with lethargy. He wants a perceptive silence in which people are not obsessed with apparent progress. Not doing anything, not speaking in any tongue would give mankind an opportunity to introspect and to know how it has been harming itself and the others. Neruda clarifies that single-minded indulgence in the rat-race of self-centred goals leading to materialism is unwarranted. Man has the sadness of never understanding himself; the sadness of isolation. Being oblivious of consequences, he is working day in and day out in a frenzy of activities; no time for introspection. He is threatening himself to death.

Keeping quiet and discharging our duties peacefully will evolve better understanding in us. The achievement of mental peace will lead us to introspection and mutual understanding. With the development of mutual understanding comes empathy and then our life becomes a pleasant experience. We then learn to live life to the fullest with happiness, to live by maintaining harmony with earth, and to live in peace and brotherhood.

Earth seems still but nurtures life under the apparent stillness – *'when everything seems dead and later proves to be alive'*, e.g. seed that is there inside the earth seems to be dead but later in the month of spring germinates as a new life. Nature is eternal – it creates, reproduces, dies, regenerates. Thus, human beings can learn from the earth/nature to be quiet and still and grow at our own pace. We should make progress but without any aggression, selfishness and the urge for destruction.



RTC – MCGs based on Extracts

1. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

“If we were not so single-minded about keeping our lives moving, and for once could do nothing, perhaps a huge silence might interrupt this sadness of never understanding ourselves and of threatening ourselves with death”

- i.** Whom does ‘we’ refer to in the above lines?
- (a) Army men (b) Human beings
(c) Citizens of US (d) None of these
- ii.** Why does the poet want us to ‘do nothing for once’?
- (a) To give rest to our body (b) To experience the freedom
(c) To enjoy the leisure time (d) To analyse our actions
- iii.** Which figure of speech is used in the line – “If we were not so single-minded...”?
- (a) Personification (b) Allegory
(c) Alliteration (d) Repetition
- iv.** How can a huge silence do good to us?
- (a) We can achieve peace in this silence only (b) Interrupts the sadness of threatening ourselves with death.
(c) It helps us in analysing our follies (d) All of these

2. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

Now we will count to twelve and we will all keep still. For once on the face of the Earth let's not speak in any language, let's stop for one second, and not move our arms so much. It would be an exotic moment without rush, without engines, we would all be together in a sudden strangeness. Fishermen in the cold sea would not harm whales and the man gathering salt would look at his hurt hands.

- i.** 'Keeping Quiet' uses fishermen to symbolize man's:
- (a) persistent pollution of the natural environment (b) rapid degradation of human values
(c) limitless exploitation of natural resources (d) constant participation in acts of terror
- ii.** What does the poet mean by "exotic moment"?
- (a) A rare moment of calm and unity
(b) An unusual moment of lethargy
(c) A strange moment when there will be no rush and no factories will be operating
(d) None of these
- iii.** What harm do the fishermen do?
- (a) Kill the life at sea, like whales (b) Bruise their hands with years of gathering salt
(c) Green wars (d) None of these
- iv.** What's the poetic device used in the phrase "and not move our arms so much"?
- (a) Metaphor (b) Simile
(c) Pun (d) Imagery

Answer Key

1. i. (b) ii. (d) iii. (c) iv. (d)

2. i. (c) ii. (a) iii. (a) iv. (c)

1. What symbol from nature does the poet invoke to say that there can be life under stillness?-(
(a) tree (b) seed
(c) sea (d) Earth
2. What will “counting upto twelve and keeping still” help us to achieve?
(a) happiness and joy (b) peace and unity
(c) kindness and empathy (d) integrity and discipline
3. The phrase “Not move our arms” implies that we should stop:
(a) exercising (b) working hard
(c) using weapons (d) interacting
4. ‘Exotic moment’ refers to a moment of:
(a) ecstasy (b) being exquisite
(c) strangeness (d) excitement
5. “What I want should not be confused with total inactivity”. The poet here advocates:
(a) no work (b) being dead
(c) keeping quiet (d) think and act
6. The main theme of the poem ‘keeping quiet’ is to:
(a) establish the necessity of quiet introspection (b) denounce violence and wars
(c) spread awareness towards environment (d) inculcate value of quietude and silence

7. What would NOT be the result of keeping quiet?
- (a) peace and harmony
 - (b) violence, wars and destruction
 - (c) environmental awareness
 - (d) mutual respect
8. Identify the worst effect of wars according to the poet.
- (a) loss of property
 - (b) total inactivity
 - (c) pollution
 - (d) victory with no survivors
9. According to the poem, Earth is an example/symbol of apparent stillness with potential life. Which one of the following may be quoted as similar example?
- (a) warriors indulge in green wars
 - (b) underground seeds grow into fruitful trees
 - (c) fishermen harm ocean life
 - (d) salt gathers hurt their hands
10. What does the poem speak about?
- (a) the necessity to be happy
 - (b) the necessity to introspect, understand and have feelings of brotherhood
 - (c) the necessity to work quietly
 - (d) None of the above
11. What does the style of the poem symbolise?
- (a) desires
 - (b) happiness
 - (c) hope
 - (d) desire and hope

12. What is the message of the poem ?
- (a) introspection and retrospection to be more peaceful and be in harmony
 - (b) to prosper
 - (c) to be happier
 - (d) to reach out more people
13. What does the poet feel is needed to be at peace?
- (a) meeting with people
 - (b) talking with people
 - (c) interaction with the people
 - (d) Soul searching
14. According to the poet, what creates barriers?
- (a) interactions
 - (b) reactions
 - (c) fighting
 - (d) languages
15. Why does the poet ask people not to speak?
- (a) because it creates noise
 - (b) he doesn't like noise
 - (c) it makes things unpleasant
 - (d) because it creates barriers or obstacles in the form of misunderstanding amongst people
16. How is keeping quiet related to life and can change attitude?
- (a) it helps to think and search soul
 - (b) helps to scratch one's soul
 - (c) helps to develop new thinking process
 - (d) All of these
17. How will keeping quiet protect our environment?
- (a) by creating peace and brotherhood feelings
 - (b) no noise will be there
 - (c) people will not fight
 - (d) None of these
18. Why is silence treated as a big issue?
- (a) it helps to search our soul
 - (b) helps us to analyze our actions
 - (c) helps us to be thoughtful and find our true self
 - (d) All of these
19. What can be a cure or an antidote to violent actions?
- (a) speaking practice
 - (b) wise words
 - (c) polished language
 - (d) Practice of silence

20. What is the sadness in the poem that the poet speaks about ?
- (a) violence because of unthoughtfulness of the people (b) unnecessary movements
(c) speaking aloud (d) fighting
21. What does the earth symbolise?
- (a) stillness (b) perseverance & new beginning from seemingly stillness
(c) greenery (d) prosperity
22. What is always alive even when everything seems to be dead?
- (a) Mountains (b) Rivers
(c) Sun (d) Earth
23. How can the moments of no activity help people?
- (a) they will be healthy (b) they will be happy
(c) they will work easily (d) to relax and be more thoughtful
24. What will happen if there are no engines and no crowd?
- (a) noise will be lessened (b) no crowd on roads
(c) no traffic rush (d) it will create a perfect, happy moment
25. Why is the moment of silence called 'exotic'?
- (a) because of the beautiful scenery around (b) because of quiet introspection
(c) because of large gathering (d) because of perfect peace and harmony
26. What would everyone feel at that exotic moment?
- (a) happy (b) content
(c) dancing (d) strange blissful oneness
27. Why is the poet asking everyone not to speak any language?
- (a) to avoid noise (b) to avoid loud voices
(c) to avoid people (d) to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings
28. While gathering salt, what will happen to the man if he keep silent for a moment?
- (a) he will stop dropping it (b) he will look at the ground
(c) he will walk carefully (d) he will think of the harm the salt is doing to his hands

29. What does 'hurt hand' refer to?
 (a) Growing needs of the man
 (b) Growing greed of man
 (c) Unfulfilled desires
 (d) Growing insensitivity of man to pain
30. How will silence benefit the man and nature?
 (a) both will be friends
 (b) man will know nature better
 (c) man will be healthy
 (d) man will stop hurting nature and both will heal themselves
31. Which images in the poem show that the poet condemns violence?
 (a) fishermen not harming whales
 (b) wars leaving behind no survivors to celebrate
 (c) poet's refusal to deal with death
 (d) All of these
32. What kind(s) of wars are mentioned in the poem?
 (a) War against humanity
 (b) War against nature
 (c) War with gases and fire
 (d) All of these
33. What can human beings learn from nature?
 (a) beauty
 (b) keeping quiet
 (c) to be happy
 (d) working with silence
34. How does the poet perceive life?
 (a) as stillness
 (b) as silence
 (c) a noisy place
 (d) a continuous evolution of nature

Answer Key

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|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. (d) | 2. (b) | 3. (c) | 4. (c) | 5. (d) | 6. (a) | 7. (b) | 8. (d) | 9. (b) |
| 10. (b) | 11. (d) | 12. (a) | 13. (d) | 14. (d) | 15. (d) | 16. (d) | 17. (a) | 18. (d) |
| 19. (d) | 20. (a) | 21. (b) | 22. (d) | 23. (d) | 24. (d) | 25. (d) | 26. (d) | 27. (d) |
| 28. (d) | 29. (d) | 30. (d) | 31. (d) | 32. (d) | 33. (d) | 34. (d) | | |

Q.1 What will counting up to twelve and keeping still help us achieve ?

(NCERT)

Ans. Counting to twelve and keeping still will help us achieve a productive silence, which will give us time for introspection, for evaluating our follies. It will create an exotic moment of togetherness. It will save the world from disasters and wars. It will give us an opportunity to understand each other and save ourselves from death.

Q.2 What does the poem, 'Keeping Quiet' teach us ?

Ans. The poem, 'Keeping Quiet' teaches us the importance of introspection, inter-connectedness of human beings, about quietness leading to stillness, leading to peace and calmness in the world, how to bring about cessation of wars, to live by maintaining harmony with earth, and to live in peace and brotherhood.

Q.3 Do you think the poet, Pablo Neruda advocates total inactivity and death? Why / Why not?

(NCERT)

Ans. No, Neruda does not advocate total inactivity and death. He feels that peace and tranquillity should not be confused with lethargy. He wants a perceptive silence in which people are not obsessed with apparent progress. Not doing anything, not speaking in any tongue would give mankind an opportunity to introspect and to know how it has been harming itself and the others. Neruda clarifies that single-minded indulgence in the rat-race of self-centred goals leading to materialism is unwarranted.

Q.4 What is the sadness that the poet, Pablo Neruda refers to in the poem, 'Keeping Quiet' ?

(NCERT)

Ans. Pablo Neruda refers to the sadness of never understanding oneself; the sadness of isolation. Being oblivious of consequences, man is working day in and day out in a frenzy of activities; no time for introspection. He is threatening himself to death. Today, man has reached a stage where he needs to find the cause of sadness. Life has therefore become all about wars and misunderstanding.

Q.5 "Life is what it is all about". How is keeping quiet related to life ?

Ans. People pursue their goals single-mindedly on keeping their lives moving. It would be better if they give themselves some time for rest and keep quiet. It will help when they are sad, when they don't understand themselves and threaten themselves with death. Silence is productive and stillness is progress. Man should learn from nature how earth seems still but nurtures life under apparent stillness.

Q.6 Which symbol from nature does the poet invoke that there can be life under apparent stillness ? (NCERT)

Ans. The Earth is taken as a symbol – "when everything seems dead and later proves to be alive." Earth seems still but nurtures life under the apparent stillness, e.g. seed that is there inside the earth seems to be dead but later in the month of spring germinates as a new life. Nature is eternal – it creates, reproduces, dies, regenerates. Thus, human beings can learn from the earth/nature to be quiet and still and grow at our own pace.