

TENDER HEART HIGH SCHOOL, SEC. 33 B, CHD.
 CLASS: X
 SUBJECT: ENGLISH LITERATURE

Poem - A Considerable Speck
 By; Robert Frost

Setting of the Poem:

The poem 'A Considerable Speck' does not have any specific setting, still the readers feel that the poem is set on the sheet of paper on poet's desk, he is writing something. Till the speaker sees 'a speck', it appears as a dull, lifeless ambience. But once the speaker sees the speck moving, he realises it is a living mite and the pace of the poem that was languid and slow becomes fast.

The diction, rhyme scheme and the rhythm allows the readers to feel as if a speck is running, pausing, faltering, hesitating and finally cowering down in the middle of the sheet of paper, as if resigned to its fate. Further, the readers like the poet acknowledge that the 'poor' microscopic mite has the faculties (power) of mind, feelings and intelligence.

Critical Remarks:

Robert Frost's poems are simple to read but on careful analysis they showcase profound meaning. On the surface, 'The Considerable Speck', is

CLASS : X

SUBJECT : ENGLISH LITERATURE

M T W T F S S	
Page No. : -2-	YOUVA
Date :	

about the narrator, quite possibly, the poet himself, observing a tiny insect flitting across the paper on which he was writing. However, the poem is full of hidden meaning. Take, for instance, the title itself.

The word 'considerable' has two meanings: one meaning is significant and the other, capable of considering.

Here, the speck refers to the tiny insect as well as a man being a speck in comparison to God. Frost took the latter meaning in his poem 'Lesson for Today' where he compares man's insignificance before God and the God's love for man and respect for man's free will.

The following lines could be interpreted as biblical references by the poet:

- **Paper sheet so white**, implying the paper was blank with nothing written. This could be a reference to the story of creation according to the book of Genesis where God created the universe from nothing.
- **period of ink** refers to the time period of 40-days flood that wiped out everything in Noah's time.
- **This was no dust speck by my breathing blown**, according to the book of Genesis, God created man from dust and breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life.

- Plainly with an intelligence I dealt -

This has reference to God's acceptance and appreciation of man's free will and intelligence. This is further reiterated in the last four lines:

I have a mind myself and recognize
Mind when I meet with it in any guise
No one can know how glad I am to find
On any sheet the least display of mind.

The first two lines show man's intelligence and free will and the last two lines show

God's love for man and the appreciation God has for its creation. This refers to the Bible (Revelation 22, 13), 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.'

In the Bible this phrase means that Jesus is the beginning and the end, the first and the last. It also means that Jesus remains from the beginning to the end of the time. Jesus is eternal. Alpha and Omega are also the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet which was used to write the New Testament.

The first six lines of the poem are written in heroic couplets (It is a unit of two rhyming lines in poetry). For example lines 1-6 has an aabbcc rhyme scheme to reinforce the view that the speaker is Omnipotent and a hero.

Class: X

Subject: English Literature

They could be depicted or interpreted as depicting the period of creation.

The verse 2 (Lines 7-27) could bear reference to the chaos that ensued once God gave the control of creation to man.

The mite or the human realises the futility of running around and resigns to his fate.

The narrator does not kill the speck but appreciates its free-will and intelligence.

Explanation in Detail :

[Lines 1- 9]

The speaker was writing something on a sheet of paper, when he suddenly noticed a 'speck', which he would not have been able to see had it not been moving on a white sheet of paper. He was just about to stop writing by marking a period (full stop) when he steadily held his pen in the air as something strange about it (speck) made him think that it was not a speck of dust blown over by his breath - a speck of fluff (a small amount of soft, light particles).

But it was without any doubt, 'a living mite' having its own feeling and decision-making power.

[Lines 10 - 18]

After careful observation, the speaker found that the mite had stopped running as if it were frightened of his pen.

CLASS: X

SUBJECT: ENGLISH LITERATURE

But again it started running wildly and came up to the place on the paper where the ink had not yet dried and it stopped. It drank or smelt the ink but with a feeling of intense dislike and turned again to move. This made the speaker realise that the tiny insect had a mind of its own as well as intelligence.

The speaker thought that the mite could not have feet as it was too small. Yet he felt it must have a set of them which it used to run and escape as it did not want to die.

Here, the speaker is referring to the natural tendency of every living thing, from a speck to the highest category i.e., man - the desire to continue to live in whatever form it is.

[Lines 19 - 29]

The speaker says that the mite ran in fear for its life, creeping, faltering, going on and hesitating. But it finally cowered motionless in the middle of the sheet of paper, as if it had resigned to its fate, i.e., the human God, the speaker.

The speaker refrained from killing the mite not because he believed in 'Collectivistic regimenting love', an ideology quite popular in the modern world.

Tenderer-than-thou Collectivistic regimenting love has reference to the growth of communism.

CLASS: X

SUBJECT: ENGLISH LITERATURE

during that time.

Communism: It is a political system

where the state controls everything advocating the importance of the group over the individual and rejecting the presence of God.

The poet talks of communism sweeping over the world. Here in contrast to the above stated philosophy is the compassion of God allowing the little creature to rest without any harm coming upon it.

The poet did not kill the mite because he found that the mite had a mind of its own, and therefore, the right to love.

Perhaps, the speaker is suggesting that 'a speck' with intelligence is superior to a human who is devoid of wit and intelligence.

The speaker went on to say that since the mite was too small (i.e., microscopic) and he did not find anything evil in it, he allowed it to sleep on the sheet of paper.

[Lines 30-33]

The poem ends with a quatrain, in which the speaker drily but humorously says that he was delighted to encounter, the 'display of mind' on a sheet of paper.

CLASS: X

SUBJECT: ENGLISH LITERATURE

[Glossary]

1. speck - a very small spot or a small piece of dirt
2. beneath - in a lower position; here, not good enough to be seen.
3. set off - ran
4. idly - without any purpose; lazily
5. poised - not moving but ready to move.
6. unmistakably - undoubtedly
7. mite - a very small insect.
8. inclinations - feelings
9. racing - running
10. paused - stopped
11. loathing - a strong feeling of dislike or hatred
12. fly - here, flee
13. plainly - clearly
14. tiny - very small
15. a set of them: here, a set of feet
16. terror - fright
17. cunning - cleverness
18. faltered - stumbled
19. hesitate: feel uncertain about its move)
20. cower down - to crouch down and move backwards in fear; recoil
21. desperation - hopelessness
22. tenderer - than - thou - more delicate or loving than you are.
23. Collectivistic - an attitude or belief that stresses the needs of a group as a whole, not an individual.
24. regimenting - something which is imposed strictly from outside (by the state or society)

CLASS : X

SUBJECT : ENGLISH LITERATURE

25. swept - strongly affected
26. microscopic item - almost invisible insect
(here, the mite)
27. mind - thinking faculty.
28. guise - cover
29. display of mind - show of intelligence.

- last page -