

LITERATURE S.2

Once upon a time

Once upon a time, son

They used to laugh with their hearts

And laugh with their eyes;

But now they laugh with their teeth,

While their ice- block – cold eyes

Search behind my shadow.

There was a time indeed

They used to shake hands with their hearts;

But that's gone, son

Now they shake hands without hearts while their left hands

With their left hands search

My empty pockets

“Feel at home,” “Come again,”

They say, and when I come

Again and feel

At home, once, twice,

There will be no thrice.

For then I find door s shut on me.

So I have learned many things, son.

I have learned to wear many faces

Like dresses – home face,
Office face, street face, host face, cocktail face,
with all their comforting smiles
Like a fixed portrait smile.

And I have learned too
To laugh with only my teeth
And shake hands without my heart.
I have learned to say ‘Goodbye’
When I mean ‘Goodbye’,
To say ‘Glad to meet you’;
Without being glad; and to say ‘it’s been nice talking to you after being bored.’
..... Stanza.....

But believe me, son
I want to be what I used to be
When I was like you . I want
To untear all these muting things.
Most of all, I want to relearn
How to laugh, for my laugh in the mirror
Shows only my teeth like a snake’s bare fangs!

So show me, son
How to laugh; show me how
I Used to laugh and smile

Once upon a time when I was like you.

Gabriel Okara (Nigeria)

Questions

1. Who is speaking in the poem and what does he represent? (2mks)

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2. Who do you think he is speaking to in the poem? Why? (2mks)

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3. What is the subject matter of the poem? (2mks)

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4. What three things has the speaker learnt? (3mks)

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5. What does he want to relearn? (1mks)

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6. In your own words, what according to the poem do you like about the past in comparison to the present. (4mks)

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7. What do you feel about the subject matter? (3mks)

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8. What do you learn from the poem? (3mks)

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End