2. An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum by Stephen Spender ( Flamingo)

Word Meaning

1.gusty forceful

2.pallor pale colour

3.stunted growth is abnormal

4.gnarled twisted

5.fog cloudy weather

6. doom death; disaster

7.catacombs underground cemeteries near home

8. cemetery rows of graves; graveyard

9. Tyrolese valley an Austrian province has the Tyrolese valley

Stephen Spender, British poet and writer lived from 1909-1995.

He lived through the two world wars and saw the deprivation suffered by the children regarding nutrition and education.

In this poem the poet describes the state of the children in an elementary classroom in a slum. He describes the children and has advice for the Governor and Inspector to improve the lot of the children.

Description of the classroom students:

1. The children look like ‘rootless weeds’, unkempt sick and untidy. The hair is untidy and faces are pale.
2. One boy is thin as paper, ‘with rat’s eyes’. ‘Rat’s eyes’ means hungry eyes.
3. Another child has ‘stunted growth’ and twisted bones like his father probably.
4. A girl has a bent head----a thin neck.

Description of the classroom:

1. The walls have the colour of ‘sour cream’, sick looking colour; unwelcoming.
2. There is a picture of domes rising in a ‘cloudless sky’.
3. There is a picture of Shakespeare.
4. There is a picture of the Tyrolese valley in Austria. This is an Alpine valley.

(The Alps are a mountain range)

1. There is a world map.
2. The windows do not bring joy. The class looks like a narrow street with a ‘leaden sky’. There is only fog. Nature and its beauty are far from the classroom.
3. Shakespeare’s picture is meaningless. The children need good nutrition with physical exercise, access to games.
4. There is a list of donations.

Summing up:

The world map, the list of donations, Shakespeare’s bust, domes, Tyrolese valley are all meaningless for the children.

The children wear spectacles repaired with glass and look like stones.

‘On their slag heap’, the children look ‘skin and bone’ (so thin).

Slag heap: refers to their miserable circumstances.

Good nutrition and games are both neglected.

Role of the Governor/ Inspector.

They should break open their windows.

The poet refers to the windows as catacombs, underground graveyards (cemeteries near Rome)

The children need to play under blue skies on golden sands.

The deprivation their suffer tempts them to steal. What can they steal?

Can it be food or playing time?

Stephen Spender paints a sad picture of an elementary classroom in a slum. He gives the message of ‘a healthy mind in a healthy body.’