

CHAPTER- 14

AUNT JENNIFER'S TIGERS

IMPORTANT STANZAS FOR COMPREHENSION

Read the stanzas given below and answer the questions that follow each:

1. Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
They do not fear the men beneath the tree:
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Questions

- (a) Name the poem and the poet of these lines.
- (b) What are Aunt Jennifer's tigers doing? How do they look like?
- (c) Where do they live? Are they fearless? Give an example.
- (d) How do they pace?

Answers:

- (a) The poem is Aunt Jennifer's Tigers. The poet is Adrienne Rich.
- (b) They are jumping across a screen or a wall. They look like shining yellow topaz.
- (c) They live in green forests. They are fearless. They don't fear the men under the tree.
- (d) They run with a well-groomed, honourable confidence.

2. Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

Questions

- (a) What were Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through?
- (b) How was she pulling the needle?
- (c) What was lying heavily? Where?
- (d) What was upon Aunt Jennifer's hand? How did it sit there?

Answers:

- (a) Aunt Jennifer's fingers were fluttering through her wool.
- (b) She was finding even the ivory needle hard to pull.
- (c) The weight of Uncle's wedding band was lying heavily on her hand.
- (d) There was uncle's wedding band upon Aunt Jennifer's hand. It sat heavily there.

3.

3. When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

Questions

- (a) Why are Aunt Jennifer's hands called 'terrified'?
- (b) What are they still ringed with?
- (c) Where did she make the tigers?
- (d) What will happen to her tigers after her death?

Answers:

- (a) Her hands are called terrified because they passed through very hard and bitter experience of married life.
- (b) They are still ringed with those hard and testing difficulties which possessed her during her life.
- (c) She made the tigers in the panel.
- (d) Her tigers will go on jumping ahead, proud and unafraid even after her death.

QUESTIONS FROM TEXTBOOK SOLVED

Q1. How do 'denizens' and 'chivalric' add to our understanding of the tiger's attitudes?

Ans: Like all beasts of prey, the tigers are the denizens of the forest. They live far away from human settlements. They are called 'chivalric.' This indicates the majestic and honourable position that they occupy in the world of animals. So, the use of the words 'denizens' and 'chivalric' adds to our understanding of the tiger's attitudes.

Q2. Why do you think Aunt Jennifer's hands are 'fluttering through her wool' in the second stanza? Why is she finding the needle so hard to pull?

Ans: Aunt Jennifer is weaving tigers on the panel. Her hands are moving about her wool. She is finding the needle quite hard to pull. The weight of years of her married life is lying heavy on her hand. This makes the pulling of the needle so hard.

Q3. What is suggested by the image 'massive weight of uncle's wedding band'?

Ans: It suggests the weight of the harsh and tough experience of Aunt Jennifer's married life. The image is quite suggestive. The wedding band is symbolic. It represents the unbreakable bond of marriage between the husband and the wife.

Q4. Of what or whom is Aunt Jennifer terrified in the third stanza?

Ans: In the third stanza, the poet refers to Aunt Jennifer's 'terrified hands'. The old unhappy memories are still fresh in her mind. She had passed through many testing and horrible times during her married life. These ordeals crushed and suppressed her. Their effect is still visible. So, she is still ringed with those ordeals that dominated her life.

Q5. What are the 'ordeals' Aunt Jennifer is surrounded by? Why is it significant that the poet uses the word 'ringed'? What are the different meanings of 'ringed' in the poem?

Ans: The poem addresses the experiences of marriage in the midst of constrictions. The word 'ringed' is significant. It suggests that the vicious grip of her unhappy married life is still holding her tightly. The word 'ringed' has been used in two ways. First is the conventional use. Here ring is a symbol of the sacred bond of marriage. The other is the figurative use of 'ringed'. It means encircled or surrounded.

Q6. Why do you think Aunt Jennifer created animals that are so different from her own character? What might the poet be suggesting, through this difference?

Ans: The tigers are 'prancing'. They pace in 'sleek chivalric certainty'. They 'do not fear' the men beneath the tree. Thus, they are symbols of strength, fierceness and beauty. Aunt Jennifer, on the other hand, is weak and terrified. Her hands are finding it difficult to pull through her wool. The massive weight of the wedding band sits heavily on her hand. Her terrified hands are still ringed by the ordeals of married life. The contrast heightens the intensity.

Q7. Interpret the symbols found in this poem.

Ans: Adrienne Rich's 'Aunt Jennifer's Tigers', is rich in symbolism. 'The massive weight of wedding band' symbolises ordeals, hardships and worries of married life. 'Terrified hands', and 'ringed with ordeals' also indicate those unpleasant experiences that are still clinging to Aunt Jennifer physically and mentally. ,

Q8. Do you sympathise with Aunt Jennifer? What is the attitude of the speaker towards Aunt Jennifer?

Ans: Yes, we do sympathise with Aunt Jennifer. She has experienced hardships and ordeals during her married life. The attitude of the speaker towards Aunt Jennifer is equally sympathetic. The poet gives many suggestive images and symbols to present an old lady who has passed through painful experiences as well as unpleasant and terrifying periods during her married life.

MORE QUESTIONS SOLVED

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS (Word Limit: 30-40 words)

Q1. What do you learn about Aunt Jennifer's tigers on reading the poem?

Ans: Aunt Jennifer's tigers were created in the panel by her own hands. They appeared to be prancing (jumping) across a screen. They looked sleek. They were bright like yellow topaz. They were majestic and courageous. They didn't fear the men beneath the tree. They paced in 'chivalric certainty'.

Q2. How has Aunt Jennifer created her tigers? What traits of tigers do they reveal!

Ans: Aunt Jennifer's tigers are her own creations. She works with wool and ivory needles. She has created them in the panel. They have all the traits of the beasts of prey who are denizens of green forests. They are well-built and well-groomed. They are chivalric and full of confidence.

Q3. What difficulty does Aunt Jennifer face while making her tigers and why ?

Ans: Aunt Jennifer is making her tigers in the panels. She is using ivory needles. Her fingers are fluttering through the wool. She finds it difficult (hard) to pull even the ivory needles. The reason is obvious. The weight of unhappy and unfortunate experiences of her married life sits heavily on her hands.

Q4. What is the weight that lies heavy on Aunt Jennifer's hand? How is it associated with her husband?

Ans: Aunt Jennifer is working with ivory needles and wool. But she can't move her fingers freely in the wool. She finds it hard to pull even the ivory needles easily. The experiences of her past married life are quite bitter. She has unpleasant memories of her married life with her husband. The heavy weight of the wedding band sits heavily upon her hand.

Q5. How will Aunt Jennifer's hands look when she is dead?

Ans: When Aunt Jennifer dies, her hands will still look terrified. Perhaps she has experienced a lot of hardships and troubles in the past. Their effect has left its print on her hands. The ordeals that crushed her married life had surrounded and cramped her fingers and hands too.

Q6. What will happen to Aunt Jennifer's tigers when she is dead?

Ans: Aunt Jennifer's tigers will survive her. She has created the tigers in a panel. They are made of wool. These objects of art will survive their creator. The tigers will go on jumping, proud and unafraid.

Q7. Describe the poetic devices used in the poem Aunt Jennifer's Tigers'.

Ans: Adrienne Rich's Aunt Jennifer's Tigers' a beautiful short poem rich in symbolism and imagery. The metaphor 'bright topaz' depicts the shining yellow complexion of her tigers. The effective use of alliteration in 'sleek, chivalric certainty' describes the pace of the tigers effectively. 'The massive weight of wedding band' symbolises ordeals and hardships of Aunt Jennifer's married life. The images 'terrified hands' and 'ringed with ordeal' create the effect of oppression and terror as well as captivity.

Q8. How are Aunt Jennifer's tigers different from her?[All India 2014]

Ans: Aunt Jennifer's tigers are a picture of strength, beauty and certainty. They seem to be jumping across a screen. They "pace in sleek chivalric certainty". They are confident and impressive. Aunt Jennifer is a weak, depressed and terrified person. Life has been a cup of woes for her. She is still in the grip of those ordeals and terrors that she faced and suffered from during her married life. Her fingers are so 'terrified' that they find it hard to pull even the ivory needle. Thus, the contrast is amply highlighted.

Q9. What are the difficulties that Aunt Jennifer faced in her life? [Delhi 2014]

Ans: The life of Aunt Jennifer was overburdened by the duties of her married life. Hardships and sufferings were the parts of her married life. She had to face oppression by her husband even though she was old and weak.