

## B. Wordsworth

by V.S. Naipaul

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### 1. (a) Referring to the story 'B. Wordsworth describes what story did the poet narrate to the child? What was its significance?

**Answer:** The child and the poet became friends over a period and he visited the poet's house regularly to meet him. During one such visit, the poet narrated to the boy a story about a girl and a boy who were in love and their love culminated into a happy marriage. Both poets, while the boy poet loved words, the girl poet loved to watch the flowers and the trees in the garden. They lived in a one-room house but were contented with the life they were living. Soon, the girl poet announced the arrival of their baby in their house. But unfortunately, they could never celebrate the arrival of the baby because it died in her womb. The girl too died, leaving the boy poet sad and fuming over his life and destiny. He refused to pay attention to the girl's garden which resulted in its growing high and wild.

The significance of this story is that the poet narrated his own story to the child. Though he never accepted the fact that the boy did understand the feelings and the heart with which the poet conveyed the story. He presented his own life in a nutshell. The death of his wife had created a vacuum in his life and rendered him wordless. He saw no meaning in the beauty of life and continued to live for the sake of it. The same applied to his poetry. The love that he poured in the words went away with his wife's death. What was left were words which were mechanical with no feelings. Thus, his poetry was drab with no real inspiration to touch the heart of the readers. Thus, the poet though wished to write the greatest poem of the world but his incapacity to feel love without the inspiration of his wife had rendered him useless.

### (b) What was the poet's tragedy?

**Answer:** The poet arrived at the child's house with the request to be allowed to look at the bees in his yard. During this sojourn in the yard, both the poet and the child had a conversation where it was revealed that the man is a poet. The poet during this conversation revealed that he loved to watch things whether it is the bees, ants, centipedes or the flowers in the morning glory. He looks at them and cries. The boy is puzzled by the poet's words and is unable to grasp the depth of it. He wonders as to why a man would cry looking at the trivial things of nature. He is nonetheless intrigued.

The poet enquires the child if he loves his mother to which he innocently replied that when she is not beating. At this point of time, the poet asks him to buy the greatest poem ever written on the mother from him for only four cents. The child went to ask his mother for the same but is rebuffed by her and she asks the poet to leave the house immediately. The

poet remarks this snubbing as poet's tragedy as people are unwilling to buy poetry even at four cents.

The author through this incident highlights the sad condition of the poets who have no respect in society. They fail to earn money and live life on reasonable terms. People often reject their words without any consideration of the efforts behind them and if art is appreciated, they fail to get compensated monetarily. Thus, in both the cases, it is a poet's tragedy whether suffering the financial problem or being snubbed artistically.

**(c) What request did the stranger make that surprised the child and why?**

**Answer:** The last request was from a decently dressed man who begged to be allowed to watch some bees in the yard. The man wore a hat, white shirt and trousers and spoke in good English.

The request was extremely unusual because beggars usually came asking for food, money or things, a request to be allowed to watch bees was highly intriguing. The house had four gru-gru palm trees which were full of uninvited bees. Though the child's mother agreed to his request and allowed him inside yet she asked her son to keep a watch on him.

While watching the bees with the man, the child came to know that the man was a poet who watched and observed several things before writing about them. The request initially seemed bizarre but on the revelation of his true calling the child was satisfied.

**2. (a) With reference to the short story 'B. Wordsworth' what was the greatest poem of the world all about?**

**Answer:** B. Wordsworth during his walks with the little boy revealed to him about the secret of writing the greatest poem of the world. The greatest poem of the world is invariably different from what he had been working upon till now. This poem is deep and holds the maximum attention and hard work of the poet to ensure it's a success, unlike his other writing ventures. Wordsworth wants this poem to strike a chord with his readers that none others could do. Therefore, he writes only one line in a month even at the cost of completing his poem in the next twenty-two years. Wordsworth wants to ensure that this poem of his, surpasses not only his expectations but also of his readers. Thus in the one line that he writes each month, he infuses all the experiences of that month. He works fervently to create the masterpiece of a poem only to never complete it.

Wordsworth fails to sell his poetry and his failure as a salesman takes a toll on his ability to write continuously without expectations. It is tragic that the world refuses to appreciate poetry and considers poets to be worthless, writing absurd things. The little boy's appreciation makes him see some hope and this is why he reveals only one line of his greatest poem, However, he is soon disillusioned and realizes the world does not

appreciate deep thoughts. B. Wordsworth himself acknowledges his mistake of spending his entire life writing the greatest poem in the world and living a dream that was never going to be a reality.

**(b) Why did the poet negate his own story at his death bed?**

**Answer:** The poet, negating his own story at the death bed, wanted to shield the little boy from the harsh realities of life. The poet could see the latent talent within the little boy to be a poet. He saw his early life in the little boy. The fire and curiosity to understand the little things in life was explicitly visible in the boy. The reflection of a poet in making, who would have to invariably face the same trials and rejections as a poet, hurts the poet to no end. He wanted to save the little boy from the misery and tragedy of the real-life where there are no buyers and appreciators of a poet's words. Poets are considered to be worthless, churning out nonsensical content for the sake of appreciating beauty. People fail to see through the deep meaning of a poet's words and feel the enlightening experience by reading it. Thus, to save the boy from the fate that he met in his life as a poet, he negates his own story at the end, making a mockery out of his own existence.

**(c) 'It was just as though B. Wordsworth had never existed.' Explain the significance of the last line of the story.**

**Answer:** At the end of Naipaul's story, "B. Wordsworth" the little boy revisits Alberto Street a year later and finds no trace of the poet and his humble abode. The mango tree and the plum tree and the coconut tree had all been cut down, and there were brick and concrete everywhere. It was just as though B. Wordsworth had never existed.

The last line of the story elucidates the fact that B. Wordsworth was never the greatest poet in the world. He failed to make an impression on the minds of the readers and therefore lived a life of oblivion. Poets are the greatest treasure troves for society because they express the unexpressed by using the power of their beautiful words. Long after they are gone, people always remember them for the words they wrote. Unfortunately for B. Wordsworth, he could not make a mark as a poet, enough to be remembered by the world after he was gone. Therefore, his house being pulled down had no significance as he was just another human being dead and forgotten with no trace of existence in this world.

**Long Questions and Answers**

**1. What are the issues raised in the story B. Wordsworth?**

**OR**

**What does V.S. Naipaul want to convey through his story, B. Wordsworth?**

**Answer** B. Wordsworth is basically a simple and sweet story that speaks about the life of an aspiring poet. But the story also highlights certain serious issues and endeavours faced by the ordinary people of Miguel Street.

The major issue is the status of poets in a society inhabited by common people, whose life revolves around the business of existence. Poetry does not make any sense to them. In fact, poets are not treated seriously. Their beautiful words on nature or on people hardly get noticed. When he tries to sell his poem, he is told to 'haul his tail away.'

The poet is used to such rejection. The worst part is that poets are not considered a good company. The author's mother beats him when he comes back after spending a day with the poet. The poet also raises poetic sensibilities in the child but tries to turn him back from the attempt as he feels the boy will not get anywhere with this talent. So he tells the boy that all the talk about his poem is a lie. A year later, when the boy tries to locate the house, he cannot see a sign of it. It seemed like it has vanished and that B. Wordsworth never existed.

The name of the poet also suggests the disparity between the white and black poets. White is renowned and stays in the civilized society of literature and culture. The black one fades into oblivion. Even his house is pulled down after his death and no trace is left.

What Naipaul does in the story is, to raise the question of the role of the creative artist in society. Miguel Street people do not waste their time watching a swarm of bees in their backyards, for they have been socialized to look away from their backyard or laugh off everything that doesn't pertain to the business of living. They don't take lessons from nature and thereby lose half the pleasure of living or learning. Their life is devoid of reflection, contemplation, and inquiry. It is sad that even though the poet is society's creative artist yet his voice is not heard.

## **2. Give the characterisation of B. Wordsworth.**

**Answer:** B. Wordsworth is one of the characters of Miguel Street. He has a soft nature. He is creative and curious about his surroundings especially Nature. He is reflective, contemplates a lot and observes the mysteries of existence and distils lessons from them.

B. Wordsworth equates himself with W. Wordsworth as he feels their nature is similar. Both love nature and get divine lessons from it. But he is not appreciated by the society he lives in. They are indifferent to him. But he does not care as he stoically accepts his position. He befriends the young boy and teaches him to appreciate the beauty all around, but later he himself tells the boy that all he told him were lies and he should not go back to him. Maybe he does not want the young boy to be like him and get alienated from society.

The poet has written one line of his poem: 'The past is deep'. He hopes to finish it in twenty-two years. He also tells the boy, 'When you are a poet, you cry for everything. What he means is that a poet is so sensitive that he is moved by many things which other people will not even respond to. He also wonders about his own identity. When the policeman asks him who he is, he replies, 'I have been asking myself the same question for the last forty years'. This sums up his existence.

B. Wordsworth, on the whole, comes as a sensitive, intelligent, caring and loving being who wins our heart with his frank and straightforward nature and wins our appreciation with his wisdom and understanding. He is a friend, guide and philosopher to the boy. He believes the boy as well as whoever appreciates nature can become a creative artist.