

# 4

## POETRY

# Childhood

–Markus Natten



*In the poem 'Childhood', the poet, Markus Natten wonders about his lost childhood. Childhood is the stage of innocence in which the child believes in others and lives with unconditional love. The poet thinks of the moments when he lost his innocence and realises the hypocrisy of the people around him. These people pretend to be nice to each other but in reality, do not like each other. He finally comes to the conclusion that his childhood went to some unknown place or is hiding in the face of an innocent infant.*

## Topic Notes

-  About the Poet
-  Poem in Detail
-  Poetic Devices
-  Significant Morals
-  Dictionary





## About the Poet

Markus Natten is a poet from Norway. He wrote famous and profound poems, the most popular poem is 'The Childhood'. He attained immense popularity and recognition for his poem.



## Poem in Detail

### Stanza 1

*When did my childhood go?  
Was it the day I ceased to be eleven,  
Was it the time I realised that Hell and Heaven,  
Could not be found in Geography,  
And therefore could not be,  
Was that the day!*

### Interpretation

The poet wonders when he lost his childhood. He reflects that maybe it was the day when he crossed the age of eleven or it was the stage when he realised the concepts of hell and heaven, did not exist in reality and geography textbooks did not have the location of any such places. The poet wonders that he might have lost his childhood when he gained his rational outlook towards life.



### Poet's Mood

→ Nostalgic, contemplating

### Example 1. Extract Based:

Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow:

*When did my childhood go?  
Was it the day I ceased to be eleven,  
Was it the time I realised that Hell and Heaven,  
Could not be found in Geography,  
And therefore could not be,  
Was that the day!*

- (A) Which of the following words DOES NOT mean 'ceased'?
- (a) End (b) Halt  
(c) Stop (d) Prolonged
- (B) In the given stanza, the poet says, 'Was that the day!' Which day is being talked about here?
- (C) What does the poet realise about hell and heaven?
- (a) They can be found in his geography books.  
(b) They do not exist in reality.  
(c) They are found in stories.  
(d) They are created by humans.
- (D) Fill in the blanks with an appropriate answer.  
The poetic device used in the given stanza is

- (E) State whether the given statement is TRUE or FALSE.

The tone of the poem is melancholic.

Ans. (A) (d) Prolonged

**Explanation:** The word 'ceased' means to stop or bring something to an end. The word, prolonged, means to continue something for a long time. All the other words except 'prolonged' are synonyms of cease. Hence, (d) is correct.

- (B) In the given stanza, the poet is wondering about his lost childhood. He is asking himself if it was the day when he was no longer eleven years old.

- (C) (b) They do not exist in reality.

**Explanation:** The poet has come to a realisation that hell and heaven do not exist in real life as they cannot be found in geography books. Since, they can't be located anywhere on the world map, he concludes that they are just imaginary places. Hence, (b) is correct.

- (D) Antithesis

**Explanation:** The poetic device used in the given stanza is 'Antithesis' in the phrase 'Hell and Heaven'. Antithesis is the use of opposite terms written together to highlight the contrast.

- (E) True

**Explanation:** The tone of the poem is melancholic and sad. The poet is sad that his childhood has gone. It cannot come back and things have changed over the years. He misses being a carefree child.

### Stanza 2

*When did my childhood go?  
Was it the time I realised that adults were not all  
they seemed to be,  
They talked of love and preached of love,  
But did not act so lovingly,  
Was that the day!*

### Interpretation

In this stanza, the poet reflects that maybe he lost his childhood when he was able to understand the hypocrisy of adults. The people are deceitful, as they follow and preach different standards of behaviour.

They told the poet to be loving and caring; however, they themselves were argumentative, violent, and discourteous. Their behaviour was way different from what they preached and advocated so reverently for the child. Perhaps, says the poet, recognising hypocrites was a major step towards adulthood.



### Poet's Mood

→ Realisation

**Example 2.** What opinion does the poet form about all the adults? What did he expect?

**Ans.** The poet realised that adults are deceptive by nature. They are hypocrites who preach love and kindness, but in reality, they are callous and cruel. They don't care about the feelings of other people. He expected them to have the innocence of childhood and be caring and kind.

### Stanza 3

*When did my childhood go?*

*Was it when I found my mind was really mine,*

*To use whichever way I choose,*

*Producing thoughts that were not those of other people, But my own, and mine alone*

*Was that the day!*

### Interpretation

The poet deliberates on the same question about when he lost his childhood. Perhaps it was the day when he realised that his mind was his own and he could use it the way he want. He could think independently, form his own opinions and his own decisions. This instilled a sense of individuality in him, which set him free from the preconceived notion of others. His opinions and experiences shape his thoughts now.



### Poet's Mood

→ Curious; pensive

### Stanza 4

*Where did my childhood go?*

*It went to some forgotten place,*

*That's hidden in an infant's face,*

*That's all I know.*

### Interpretation

In this stanza, the poet changes his question. The poet now wonders where his childhood has gone. He reflects that maybe his childhood has gone to some forgotten place. He further says that his childhood can be found in the innocent face of a child who is not pretentious and rational, and who trusts others unconditionally. In other words, the innocence of a child stays till the time he is young, and that is all he knows.



### Poet's Mood

→ Pondering

**Example 3.** How did the realisation of being the master of his own mind helped the poet?

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**Ans.** The realisation that the poet was the master of his own mind, and could use it the way he liked, filled him with self - confidence. He could now think independently and take his own decisions. His opinions are not limited by the thoughts of others.

**Example 4.** What hurting disclosures does the poet have as he gains maturity?

**Ans.** The poet, upon gaining maturity comes to an understanding that hell and heaven are only imaginary places in the mind of a child and do not exist in reality. He also realises that people are not who they claim to be. They have a hurting and a shocking side to them.



### Poetic Devices

- (1) **Alliteration:** In this figure of speech, a number of words having the same first consonant sound occur close together in a series. For example, 'Hell and Heaven', 'that the day', 'my mind', 'whichever way', 'thoughts that', 'the time', etc. All these word combinations are used in this poem.
- (2) **Antithesis:** This figure of speech refers to the placement of opposing or contrasting ideas together. This emphasises the difference between the two ideas and adds creativity to the writing. It can be seen in the use of words, hell and heaven.
- (3) **Enjambment:** This figure of speech refers to the practice of running lines of poetry from one to the next without using any punctuation. For example, was it the time I realised that adults were not all they seemed to be?

- (4) **Repetition:** Repetition means repeating of a word or phrase to create a certain effect. For example, "When did my childhood go?", "Was that the day!" have been repeated several times.
- (5) **Personification:** It is the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects. For example, "It went to some forgotten place". Here, the childhood has been personified.
- (6) **Inversion:** When the subject-verb order is reversed, it is called Inversion. For example, "To use whichever way I choose."



## Significant Morals

- Childhood is a stage of innocence in which the child believes in others and loves unconditionally.
- The first step to maturity or the loss of childhood is when one is able to think logically and rationally.
- Forming one's own opinion and not getting influenced by others is also a sign of maturity or a loss of childhood.
- The hypocrisy is prevalent in our society, where people pretend to be nice to each other but in reality, do not like each other.



## Dictionary

| Word             | Meaning          | Synonym           | Antonym    |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------|
| <i>Ceased</i>    | come to an end   | stop              | commence   |
| <i>Preached</i>  | talked or spoken | taught            | discourage |
| <i>Act</i>       | behave           | react             | do nothing |
| <i>Producing</i> | creating         | fabricate         | separating |
| <i>Forgotten</i> | unremembered     | past recollection | remembered |
| <i>Infant</i>    | a small child    | new born          | adult      |
| <i>Seemed</i>    | appeared         | look              | ignore     |

## OBJECTIVE Type Questions

[ 1 mark ]

1. What did the poet sense about himself when he realised he could use his own mind the way he wanted?

- He sensed that he was as intelligent as his friends.
- He sensed his own individuality and his independent personality.
- He sensed that he was very smart.
- He sensed that he could use his mind in creative work

**Ans.** (b) He sensed his own individuality and his independent personality.

**Explanation:** The poet sensed that his mind was his own and he could use it the way he desired. He could produce his own thoughts which were not limited to others. Hence, (a) correct.

2. Identify the poetic device used in 'my mind':

- simile
- metaphor
- enjambment
- alliteration

**Ans.** (d) alliteration

**Explanation:** In alliteration, a number of words having the same first consonant sound occur close together in a series. The words, 'my mind' have same consonant sound. Hence, (d) is correct.

3. The poet realises about his mind that:

- he could use it in whichever way he want.
- he could take his own decisions.
- he could form his own opinions.
- All of the above.

**Ans.** (d) All of the above.

**Explanation:** The poet, in his childhood, realised that his mind was his own and was capable of producing thoughts and opinions which were not influenced by the other individuals in the society. This discovery is crucial because it unwinds the hypocrisy and

double standards maintained by adults. Hence, (d) is correct.

4. According to the poet, the adults are described as:

(a) practical (b) hypocrites  
(c) stupid (d) clever

Ans. (b) hypocrites

**Explanation:** The poet realised that adults were hypocrites as they preach love and yet never behave so affectionately. They ask their children to be kind and loving, but they are themselves selfish and cruel. They are double-faced. Hence, (b) is correct.

5. What did the poet realise about adults?

(a) They are mature.  
(b) They want to earn money.  
(c) They are not what they seem to be.  
(d) They are cunning and selfish.

Ans. (c) They are not what they seem to be.

**Explanation:** The poet realised that adults were hypocrites as they preach love, which they haven't shown in their whole life. They ask their children to be kind and loving, but they are themselves selfish and cruel.

6. According to the poet, Adulthood is a period when his thoughts and perceptions are:

(a) changing (b) remain same  
(c) identical (d) equivalent

[Diksha]

Ans. (a) changing

**Explanation:** According to the poet, adulthood is the phase when a person's thoughts and opinions about the world keep changing. For example, when the poet was a child, he used to think that hell and heaven existed in real life. However, as he gained maturity, he came to the understanding that these are just imaginary places and cannot be located on a map.

## Extract Based Questions

7. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

*When did my childhood go?*

*Was it the time I realised that adults were not  
all they seemed to be,*

*They talked of love and preached of love,*

*But did not act so lovingly,*

*Was that the day!*

- (A) The significance of the given extract is that it highlights:

(a) the true nature of adults.  
(b) the innocence inherent in children.

(c) the contrast between adulthood and innocence.

(d) how adulthood changes people.

- (B) State whether the following is TRUE or FALSE.

The poet is appreciative of the adults.

- (C) The poet is continuously asking questions and answering them himself. What does this show?

Ans. (A) (c) The contrast between adulthood and innocence.

**Explanation:** The poet becomes nostalgic about his childhood. He feels that the phase of childhood is full of innocence. A child is neither a hypocrite nor manipulative. Adults, on the other hand, are deceptive in nature. They claim to have all the good qualities, but in reality, they are selfish and heartless. Hence, (c) is correct.

- (B) False

**Explanation:** The poet is not appreciative of the adults, as he finds them to be hypocrites and also finds his trust in them to be broken.

- (C) The poet's act of continuously asking questions and answering them himself shows that the poet feels that the journey from childhood to adulthood is set in stages. He doesn't believe in adults around him anymore neither does he trust their words. That's why he has decided to answer his own questions.

8. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

*When did my childhood go?*

*Was it when I found my mind was really mine,*

*To use whichever way I choose,*

*Producing thoughts that were not those of  
other people,*

*But my own, and mine alone*

*Was that the day!*

- (A) What does the phrase 'my mind was really mine' really mean?

(a) The poet produce his own thoughts.  
(b) The poet could use his own mind.  
(c) The poet does not need anyone's influence.

(d) Both (a) and (b)

- (B) Fill in the blanks with an appropriate answer.

The literary devices used in the given extract are .....

- (C) How in the poet's opinion, do childhood and adulthood vary?

**Ans. (A)** (d) Both (a) and (b)

**Explanation:** The poet had realised that his mind was of his own and he could use it the way he wanted. Nobody can control his mind and he was capable of forming own thoughts. He could also take mature decisions. Hence, (d) is correct.

**(B)** *alliteration*

**Explanation:** The poetic device is alliteration. An example of alliteration is

'my mind'. Here, the first consonant of the word is being repeated.

**(C)** Childhood has been considered by the poet as a blissful period in one's life, where a child trusts everyone. Whereas, adulthood is marked by rational and creative thoughts, the ability to perceive a situation well, differentiate between right and wrong, and learn new things. In this stage of life, one also learns to be double-faced and crafty.

## SHORT ANSWER Type Questions (SA)

[ 2 marks ]

**Answer the following questions in about 40 - 50 words:**

**9. What, according to the poem is involved in the process of growing up?**

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**Ans.** According to the poem, the process of growing up involves attaining maturity and also having a good sense of judgement. When the poet turns into an adult, he realises that the adults are hypocrites. They talk and preach of love but never behave so lovingly. He also realises that he has his own mind and thoughts, which can't be limited to anyone.

**10. Explain the theme of the poem.**

**Ans.** The theme of the poem is the process of growing up, from childhood to adulthood. Childhood, the heavenly period of innocence, lasts until one becomes a teenager. This transition brings about a radical change in one's understanding of the world.

**11. What is the poet's feeling towards childhood?** [Delhi Gov. QB 2022]

**Ans.** The poet regards childhood as an important stage in the process of growing up. Childhood is a period of make-believe. A child readily accepts whatever the elders say. He is far away from the harsh realities of life.

**12. Which lines in the poem are the most poetic, and why?**

**Ans.** The lines in the last stanza are the most poetic.

*Where did my childhood go?*

*It went to some forgotten place*

*That's hidden in an infant's face,*

*That's all I know.*

In these lines, the poet beautifully explains what most adults feel. These lines describe the innocent world of an infant, where the poet thinks his childhood seems to be lying hidden.

The purity of his childhood times will never come back, though it can be seen in an infant's face.

**13. How does the poet differentiate between childhood and adulthood?**

**Ans.** According to the poet, childhood is a blissful period in one's life where a child trusts everyone. He is incapable of differentiating between fantasy and reality. However, upon reaching maturity, the innocence fades away with time, and can only be seen in the face of an infant. According to him, it is a process of life that an individual grows up and gradually begins to understand his own thoughts. He realises that many things don't exist the way he thought they would. He slowly starts understanding the concept of the world and the people around him.

**14. What loss does the poet regret? What does he contemplate?**

**Ans.** Natten regrets the loss of his childhood, his childlike purity, and his innocence. He wonders where he lost it. Perhaps, when he crossed eleven and developed a questioning attitude. Now he has realised that heaven and hell were imaginary things. He has also noticed that grown-ups were blatant liars. They talked of love but practised hatred. Finally, he started thinking freely and differently from others.

**15. What does the poet discover about the adults in the poem 'childhood'?**

**Ans.** The poet in the poem, 'Childhood' does not think highly of the adults. He calls the adults hypocrites who say something but do something else. The poet interprets that the adults talk about love, but they do not preach it themselves, and ends up calling them hypocrites.

**16. What did the poet notice about independent thinking? How important was this discovery?**

**[Delhi Gov. Term - 2 SQP 2022]**

**Ans.** The poet discovered that he was different from others and could think independently. He could have his own opinions without being influenced by anyone. This discovery was important to him as it revealed his ability for independent thinking and decision making.

**17. According to the poet, what are the three hallmarks of growing up?**

**Ans.** (1) Rationalism - The ability to see the difference between fantasy and reality and between right and wrong.  
(2) Hypocrisy- Adults are hypocrites. They talk about spreading love and behaving kindly, but they do not follow the idea themselves.  
(3) Individuality - The poet realises that his mind is capable of producing thoughts, and he can take his own decisions.

**18. What question does the poet ask in the beginning of the poem? Does he get an answer?**

**Ans.** The poet has lost his childlike innocence. He wonders when he outgrew his childhood and where he left it behind. After some analysis he answers the question himself. Only a child has the privilege to remain simple, honest, and clean. As one grows, one becomes dishonest. Childhood lies hidden in the face of an infant.

**19. What is the focus of the poem 'Childhood'?**

**[Diksha]**

**Ans.** The main focus of the poem 'Childhood' is the loss of innocence when a person attains maturity and an understanding of the world. An infant has the purest heart and an innocent face. He believes everything that is said by an adult and is incapable of differentiating between good and bad. However, as a person grows up, he or she gains a sense of individuality and is able to rationalise well.

**20. Why is the tone of the poem melancholic?**

**Ans.** The tone of the poem is pensive and melancholic because the poet has lost his innocence upon gaining maturity. He misses his childhood and wonders when he lost his childlike innocence. No matter what he does or says, he cannot get those precious times back. He cannot be carefree and free of life anymore.

## **LONG ANSWER Type Questions (LA)**

**[ 5 marks ]**

*Answer the following questions in about 120 - 150 words:*

**21. 'Childhood is an essential phase in the process of growing up, but it can't go on forever.' Discuss.**

**Ans.** Childhood is an important stage in the process of growing up for every person. The infant is totally dependent on others and is incapable of making his own decisions and producing creative thoughts. The child doesn't know how to differentiate between right and wrong, good and bad, and is lost in an imaginative world where everything seems lovely and magical. Childhood is the age when children gain the skills that they require to become well-functioning adults. What a child learns during those times builds the foundation for his future growth and his perspective on life and people. Sadly, this phase of innocence and purity cannot last forever. A person grows up to become mature and understanding. After gaining maturity, the person acquires reasoning power. He also acquires a fine capability for analysis and discrimination.

Now he can see through people and things. He begins to understand the hypocrisy of adults. He gains confidence and becomes an independent thinker.

**22. 'Childhood' is a poetry that exposes man and shows his true colours. What actions need to be taken to restore a person's innocence?**

**Ans.** 'Childhood' symbolises innocence, purity, softness, and love. As a child grows, these qualities start receding. Humans become impure, cunning, shrewd, and hypocritical. Grownups become blatant liars. They talk of love but practise hatred. They preach brotherhood and mankind, but exhibit hatred. Simplicity and honesty evaporate into thin air the moment a person crosses the threshold of innocent childhood.

Every effort should be made to revive the innocence of childhood. Every step should be taken to fill the vacuum created by the greed and selfishness of a human with the warmth of the innocence and laughter of a child. There would be less hatred and more peace everywhere if a person starts practising what

he or she preaches. It can happen if a human brings forth his or her true noble qualities. Layers of hatred have covered the purity and innocence of humans. If a person removes this facade, the world would become a better place to live in.

- 23. Markus Natten, though showing disapproval regarding the behaviour of adults, also raises a very important point, that of independent thinking and individuality. Do you agree that independent thinking and individuality make us sensible? Elaborate in the context of the poem 'Childhood'.**

**Ans.** Yes, independent thinking is a step towards adulthood. As a child, one is not able to make one's own decisions, and one's thinking is always influenced and directed by adults. A child is too innocent to be able to distinguish between truth and imagination.

As child's thinking is influenced by others, it has no individuality, and it is prone to manipulations. Independent thinkers are valued because of their determined nature and ability to work without guidance. Thinking independently makes us what we are. It shapes our personality and we are recognised among people through what our mind creates and what decisions we take.

If we want to stay away from people who influence our thoughts for their selfish purposes, then only independent thinking

can help us. We shouldn't claim to have individuality if we cannot take decisions ourselves.

- 24. Today's materialistic society is responsible for the loss of innocence in a person's life. Write an article on this topic in about 120 - 150 words.**

**Ans.            Loss of Innocence in Today's Time**

by Roshni

We live in a world where it has become quite difficult to discern someone's real intentions. People have turned into hypocrites as their words contradict their actions. It is impossible to trust someone blindly. And if you are doing that, it's a sign that you are a fool who is living a lie. Society plays a significant role in shaping a person's thoughts. Even a truly knowledgeable and innocent individual might quickly be swayed by the wrong crowd. Once this happens, it becomes impossible to escape a trap like this. Even if a person who has a history of committing many sins and betraying the trust of others wants to change for the better, society won't let him do that. In today's materialistic society, people only care about possessing luxurious homes and lavish cars. A person is not known for his positive characteristics but is well known for his ability to deceive others. We must alter our behaviour before it is too late.

