

## NOW THE LEAVES ARE FALLING FAST

W.H. Auden

WYSTAN HUGH AUDEN (1907 -1973), who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1948 for his collection *The Age of Anxiety*, was a versatile and intellectually vigorous poet, verse dramatist, critic, translator and editor. Poetry to him was a 'serious game' which should deepen people's self awareness but it should, in no case, directly affect men's political or religious choices. His early poems exhibit his interest in political affairs and ideas but his later poems are overtly Christian and more personal in tone. As a technician, Auden explored a variety of stanza forms and meters. He had a passion for word-coining and using archaic words, which makes him, at times, difficult to understand. He left England as early as 1939 to settle permanently in the United States. Auden's work is divided into the British and American phases. The notable works of the English phase are *The Orators*, *The Dance of Death*, *Look Stranger*, *Spain*, and *Another Time*. The notable works of the American phase include *New Year Letter*, *For the Time Being*, *The Age of Anxiety*, and *The Shield of Achilles*. The present lyric 'Now the Leaves are Falling Fast' enacts the frustration inherent in human life, the aspirations that are not fulfilled and the sense of loneliness in which every individual lives and dies.



A. Work in small groups and discuss these questions :

- 1 There is a season in which trees shed their leaves. Which season is this? What are the other things that take place in this season?
- 2 What feelings do the trees without leaves evoke in you?
- 3 How do old people think about their own life and age when they see a child?

### NOW THE LEAVES ARE FALLING FAST

Now the leaves are falling fast,  
Nurse's flowers will not last;  
Nurses to the graves are gone,  
And the prams go rolling on.

Whispering neighbours, left and right,      5  
Pluck us from the real delight:  
And the active hands must freeze  
Lonely on the separate knees.

Dead in hundreds at the back  
Follow wooden in our track,      10  
Arms raised stiffly to reprove  
In false attitudes of love.

Starving through the leafless wood  
Trolls run scolding for their food:  
And the nightingale is dumb.      15  
And the angle will not come.

Cold, impossible, ahead  
Lists the mountain's lovely head  
Whose white waterfall could bless  
Travellers in their last distress.      20



**B.1. Read the following sentences and write 'T' for true and 'F' for false statements :**

- a) The leaves are falling very fast.
- b) The nurses are still there to take care of the flowers.
- c) All the prams are gone to the grave.
- d) 'Whispering neighbours' disturb the 'real delight' of the ageing persons.
- e) Old persons feel lonely as they gradually become inactive.

- f) Death freezes the body and separates us from the crowd of the people.
- g) The promises of love are often deceptive.
- h) Starvation and suffering do not characterise human life.
- i) Travellers get one relief in the waterfall of the mountain.
- j) 'The prams go rolling on' suggests the continuity of life.

**B.2 . Complete the following sentences on the basis of the poem:**

- i. Nurses to the .....rolling one.
- ii. Cold, impossible, ahead .....  
 ..... lovely head  
 ..... could bless  
 ..... last distress.

**B.3. Answer the following questions briefly:**

- 1) What does the poet mean when he says "Now the leaves are falling fast"?
- 2) What are the words in the second stanza that suggest death and the effect of death on human body?
- 3) How do we complete our last journey to the grave?
- 4) What do 'Trolls' do in the 'leafless wood'?
- 5) Who are the 'travellers' and how will they be 'blessed'?
- 6) Which words in the first stanza suggest objects from Nature?
- 7) Who are the 'whispering neighbours'?
- 8) How does human life become miserable?
- 9) In what way will the travellers be blessed?

**GLOSSARY AND NOTES**

**Nurse's flowers** (n): flowers growing under or beside a supporting tree called 'nurse'.

**prams** (n): (perambulators) a four wheeled baby carriage.

**whispering neighbours**: agents or messengers of death.

**pluck** (v): detach, take away

**freeze** (v): become ice cold after death

**wooden** (adj): in wooden coffins

**stiffly** (adj): in a hardened, difficult way

**reprove** (v): rebuke

**attitudes** (n): ways of thinking

**trolls** (n): wicked and ugly creatures in Scandinavian mythology.

**angle** (n): artistic or human perspective.

**last distress** (n): end of life, death

### C. 1. Long Answer Questions

1. Falling of leaves suggests the process of death and human waste on a large scale. Explain with reference to the poem.
2. The poet is critical of negative tendencies of the human society. What are these tendencies? Give details.
3. Who are the 'Strolls' in the real world '?
4. Though the poet refers to 'death' several times, yet the poem is not a pessimistic one. Justify your answer.

### C. 2. GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following in **groups** or **pairs**:

1. Mortality and continuity are the two wheels on which 'life' runs.
2. Love and compassion alone can save humanity.

### C. 3. COMPOSITION

Write a paragraph in about 100 words on each of the following:

- a. If winter comes, can spring be far behind?
- b. Let us make this world a better place to live in.

### D. WORD STUDY

#### D.1. Dictionary Use

**Ex. 1.** Look up a dictionary and write two meanings of the following words – the one in which it is used in the lesson and the other which is more common

last  
stiff

lonely  
attitude

reprove  
distress

freeze

#### D.2. Word-formation

**Read carefully the following sentence taken from the poem:**

*And the prams go rolling on..*

In the above sentence the word 'pram' is the shortened form of perambulators. Write down the short forms of the following:

examination \_\_\_\_\_  
programme \_\_\_\_\_

department \_\_\_\_\_  
 congratulation \_\_\_\_\_  
 modern \_\_\_\_\_  
 advertisement \_\_\_\_\_

### D.3. Word-meaning

Ex 1. Write the antonyms of the following words and use them in your own sentences:

falling	_____	fast	_____
last	_____	real	_____
freeze	_____	separate	_____
responsive	_____	false	_____
impossible	_____	bless	_____

### E. GRAMMAR

Ex. 1. Read the following sentences carefully:

*'And the prams go rolling on'.*

The line suggests continuity of an action. It can also be rewritten as: 'And the prams go on rolling.'

Write five similar sentences with 'go on' using the following verbs: swim, walk, read, sleep, sketch.

Ex. 2. Read the following sentences carefully:

*'And the active hands must freeze...'*

In the above line 'must' suggests 'compulsion' or necessity. 'Must' is different from 'should' and 'ought to' which suggest 'suggestion' or 'obligation'. Fill in the blanks with 'must', 'should', 'ought to' to complete the following sentences:

1. We ..... follow a suitable time-table of study.
2. The young ..... be considerate about the sentiments of their elders.
3. Death does not mean the end of everything, life ..... go on.
4. Why ..... I always follow the fashion?
5. We, the Indians, ..... show respect to the national flag.

### F. ACTIVITIES

Ex. 1. Have you read any other poem that describes the process of decay and regeneration? Make a summary of the poem and compare the ideas of the two poems.

Ex. 2. Observe how plants and trees grow and change in different seasons. Write one short paragraph each for the three main seasons. Use pictures of the seasons and paste them on the class-board.