

The Lamentation of The Old Pensioner

W.B. Yeats

*WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS (1865-1939), Irish poet and dramatist, was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923. He worked incessantly for Irish independence and for an Irish literature separate from British literature. Co-founder of the Irish National Theatre Company, he was instrumental behind the Irish theatrical, cultural and literary revival with his play *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) and the collection of stories *The Celtic Twilight* (1893). He admired and collected old Irish folk tales and legends. Inspired by the heroes, the romance, and the magic of these legends, he often scattered parts of many legends into a single poem. The elaborate style of his earlier work was influenced by the pre-Raphaelites, while his later work used a sparser, more lyrical, style and was influenced by symbolism, mysticism and the occult. His best-known collections from this period are *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair* (1929). This poem 'The Lamentation of The Old pensioner' (1939) which is a revised version of Yeats's earlier poem 'The Old Pensioner' (1890), presents the poet's reminiscences of his young life which become more agonising when he looks at his present state and contrasts his time of youth with his state in the old age.*



A. Work in small groups and discuss these questions:

1. How does a person change when he grows old?
2. How do these changes affect an old person?
3. Is there any change in attitude and behaviour of an old man? How and why? Compare youth with old age.
4. What is pension? Who gets pension? Do you know any pensioner?

The Lamentation of The Old Pensioner

Although I shelter from the rain
Under a broken tree
My chair was nearest to the fire
In every company
That talked of love or politics,
Ere Time transfigured me.

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Though lads are making pikes again
For some conspiracy,
And crazy rascals rage their fill
At human tyranny,
My contemplations are of Time
That has transfigured me.



10

There's not a woman turns her face
Upon a broken tree.
And yet the beauties that I loved
Are in my memory;
I spit into the face of Time
That has transfigured me.

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B.1. Answer the following questions briefly :

1. What is the meaning of the line 'Ere Time transfigured me'?
2. What was the speaker interested in as a young man?
3. What are the young men doing now?
4. What is the poet thinking about in lines 11-12?
5. Who does the speaker remember in the last stanza?
6. 'I spit into the face of Time'. Why does the speaker say so?

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

Ere (conj): (literary) before

pike (n): a weapon consisting of a pointed blade on the end of a long pole.

conspiracy (n): scheme, plot

rascal (n): rogue

tyranny (n): oppression

contemplation (n): reflection, meditation

transfigured (v): completely changed into something else

spit (v): spit out, expression of deep rage and contempt

C. 1. LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Make a list of things in the poem that show how the man was when he was young?
2. How does the poet feel now that he is old?
3. What does the poem tell us about the old man - his character, attitude, circumstances etc.?
4. Is there any shift in the subject matter in the three stanzas? Describe the shifts, commenting on the effect these shifts make?
5. How is the title of the poem related to the poem? Explain.
6. Write a summary of the poem in 30-35 words.
7. What idea is repeated three times in the poem? Why? Does it help to enact the theme of the poem?
8. What is the tone of the poem: complacency, resignation, rage? Why?
9. How many times has the phrase 'a broken tree' been used? What does this phrase signify in the poem? Is it a symbol?
10. Is 'Time' personified in the poem?

A **symbol** is an object or idea that has its own meaning but is used to suggest a different meaning, e.g. the dove symbolises peace and a heart is a symbol of love and romance.

Personification is a figure of speech in which an animal, object or idea is described as having human form or characteristics.

C.2. GROUP DISCUSSION

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

- a. The youths should pay greater attention to the old people
- b. Ways to deal with the changes that the old age brings

C. 3. COMPOSITION

- a. How do you think you will change when you get older? Write an essay in 150-200 words.

D. WORD STUDY

D.1. Dictionary Use

Ex. 1. Correct the spelling of the following words:

transfigurd conspirasy raskals tyranny contemplasion

Ex. 2. Look up a dictionary and write two meanings of each of the following words – the one in which it is used in the lesson and the other which is more common:

shelter

conspiracy

crazy

time

D.2. Word meaning

Ex.1 Match the words in Column A with their meanings in Column B

Column A

Ere
pike
rascal
tyranny
contemplation
transfigured
spit

Column B

completely changed
a weapon
expression of deep rage and contempt
before
oppression
rogue
meditation

E. GRAMMAR

Read the following line carefully:

My chair was nearest to the fire

In the above line '*nearest*' has been used to express the degree of comparison, here superlative degree. There are three degrees of comparison: **positive**, **comparative** and **superlative**. Mark the structure of the sentences given below:

Rimjhim is **as clever as** Ankita.

Ankita is **cleverer than** Pragya.

Snigdha is **the cleverest girl** in her class.

Ex. 1. Now fill in the blanks using the appropriate degree of comparison of the adjectives given in the brackets:

- (i) Rajesh is as Ashok. (simple)
- (ii) Bharti is than Kanchan. (beautiful)
- (iii) Kalyan is the in the locality. (popular)
- (iv) Shabbi is than Rubi. (intelligent)
- (v) Mamta is as Chhabi (practical)

F. ACTIVITY

Talk to the old people in your locality and try to find out:

What did they do when they were young?

What was their hobby when they were young?

What do they feel now when they are old?

What is their normal course of work now?

What are the changes in their life style now?

How do they adjust now?

Now do a project work on 'The art of coping with the old age'