

The Ball Poem



Introduction:-

The "Ball Poem" written by John Berryman is about a young innocent boy who has lost his ball and seems depressed. In this poem the poet tells us about our reactions at some material loss. He has touched the topic of how to stand up against the miseries and sorrows of life. This poem tells us that one has to face those intense moments when life snatches what is very dear to us. One must know how to put up with a loss without losing heart and hope, because loss of one thing is not the end of life.

Message:-

The poem has a very clear message that the process of learning the ways of the world starts at a very young age. Money cannot bring the lost things back, it can only buy new ones to replace them. The child learns a lesson of how to be careful about possessions in this materialistic world. The poem also conveys a message that one must not be emotionally attached to materialistic things, One must know how to bear the loss bravely and move on.

Stanza-1

What is the boy now, who has lost his ball,
What, what is he to do? I saw it go
Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then
Merrily over - there it is in the water!

Word Meanings:-

1. Merrily → cheerful
2. Bouncing → jumping up and down

Explanation:-

The poem starts with poet looking of the boy who has lost his ball. He wants to know about him and his reaction because the boy has lost his ball. The poet has seen the ball going away from the boy. He saw the ball jumping happily up and down the street and then falling into the water, from where it cannot be retrieved. The ball is shown to have rolled away happily which is contrasted with the gloomy mood of the boy at the loss of the ball.



Extract Based Ques/Ans:-

1. What has the boy lost?

Ans → The boy has lost his ball.

2. Who is the 'I' in the stanza?

Ans → 'I' in the stanza is the poet.

3. Which word means happily?

Ans → Merrily means happily.

4. Where did the ball go?

Ans → The ball went into the water.

5. The ball ultimately fell into the water of _____

Ans → harbour.

6. What is the boy's state of mind?

Ans → The boy is in a very gloomy, sad state of mind.

7. Name the literary device used in "Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then Merrily over — there it is in the water!"

Ans → Anaphora.

Stanza-2

No use to say 'O there are other balls';
An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy
As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down
All his young days into the harbour where
His ball went.

Word Meanings:-

1. Ultimate → final
2. Rigid → fixed
3. Harbour → a place where ships load and unload goods
4. Grief → sorrow
5. Trembling → shaking

Explanation:-

In these lines, the poet describes the mental state of the young boy who has lost his ball. The boy feels very sad by the loss of the ball. He keeps staring down the way the ball has gone. He is reminded of all the days of the past when he had played with that ball. Here the ball becomes symbolic of the childhood days of the boy.

Extract Based Ques/Ans:-

1. The loss of ball has made the boy _____
Ans → sad.
2. The poet thinks it improper to say to the boy 'O there are other balls' because
Ans → He wants the boy to learn to have a sense of loss.
3. What does the boy's reaction to the loss of his ball show?
Ans → The loss of his ball shows that the boy is very attached to the lost ball and was very upset about losing it.
4. Which poetic device has been used in 'shaking grief'?
Ans → The poetic device used in 'shaking grief' is transferred epithet as it is the grief-stricken boy who shakes, not the grief itself.
5. Why is it no use to say, 'O there are other balls' ?
Ans → The boy wants the ball he has lost.
6. Why does the boy feels trouble and stand rigid?
Ans → The boy feels trouble and stands rigid because he is thinking about the days when he was young.
7. What does the ball symbolize in this stanza?
Ans → In this stanza, the ball is symbolic of the boy's young days.

Stanza- 3

I would not intrude on him;
A dime, another ball, is worthless, Now
He senses first responsibility
In a world of possessions. People will take
Balls, balls will be lost always, little boy,

Word Meanings:-

1. Intrude → invader
2. Dime → 10 cents (U.S)
3. Worthless → valueless
4. Possessions → ownerships

Explanation :-

In these lines, the poet does not intend to interface with the emotions of the young boy by consoling him with the arguments that the ball was not worth much or that he will buy him another ball. The boy learns his first responsibility of taking care of his things and how to bear the loss of something in a world of possessions. Moreover, the boy must know that loss is a part of life and one has to put up with it bravely.

Extract Based Ques/Ans:-

1. 'I' in the first line is ____
Ans → the poet
2. What does the loss of the ball teach the boy?
Ans → The sense of responsibility.
3. Who would not intrude?
Ans → The Poet would not intrude.
4. The word "intrude" in the above extract means .
Ans → The word "intrude" means a world of possession.
5. Which poetic device is used in the last line?
Ans → Repetition.
6. What does the word 'worthless' tell us?
Ans → The word 'worthless' tells us that the boy does not wish to have another ball.
7. Losing the ball teaches the boy to ____
Ans → become responsible.

Stanza-4

And no one buys a ball back. Money is external,
He is learning, well behind his desperate eyes,
The epistemology of loss, how to stand up
Knowing what every man must one day know
And most know how many days, how to stand up.

Word Meanings:-

1. Desperate → hopeless
2. Epistemology → The Greek word episteme means 'Knowledge'

Explanation:-

In these lines, the poet says that Money is external as it can not buy memories nor it can it replace the lost things. The boy is learning the meaning of loss. The loss of the ball for the boy is, a saddening experience as he will not get back the ball that he has lost. The boy has learnt a lesson of the reality of life that people do lose things in life, but that does not bring life to a halt. He would have understood the true meaning and nature of loss,

Extract Based Ques/Ans:-

1. Which poetic device is used in the first line?
Ans → Alliteration
2. Why is money external?
Ans → Money is external because it can buy a thing to replace the lost one but cannot bring the original lost one.
3. A word in the extract that means 'study of knowledge'.
Ans → Epistemology
4. What must the boy learn according to the poet?
Ans → The boy must learn how to bear the loss and make a new beginning.
5. How are the boy's eyes?
Ans → The boy's eyes are desperate
6. What is the boy learning?
Ans → The boy is learning the meaning of loss.
7. Why are the boy's eyes 'desperate'?
Ans → The boy's eyes are 'desperate' because he has lost his ball.