

Rain on the Roof

by Coates Kinney

Central Idea of the Poem

This poem tells us what the poet is thinking about when he hears the sound of the rain falling. The poem praises the healing power of nature's rain, especially when heard from a cosy bed in a lovely cottage. The poet says that it is pleasant to live and sleep comfortably in a cottage on a rainy night, when the tinkle of the rain brings dreamy fancies and he recollects fond memories of the past. The rain is thus an instrument of beautiful memories of the past years. The sound of rain falling takes the poet to his childhood when the fondest memory of his mother is stirred (brought) before him in all her gentle loveliness.

Explanation of the Poem

Stanza 1

When the humid shadows hover
Over all the starry spheres,
And the melancholy darkness
Gently weeps in rainy tears,
What a bliss to press the pillow
Of a cottage-chamber bed,
And lie listening to the patter
Of the soft rain overhead!

WORD MEANINGS

humid shadows	clouds
hover	hang
starry spheres	stars
melancholy	sad
bliss	utmost joy
cottage-chamber	room in a cottage
patter	sound of rain falling on the roof
overhead	above

Explanation In this stanza, the poet says that stars of the sky are not visible, being covered by clouds. He says that the darkness is making him sad and reflective and the rain also seems to mirror his emotions as it looks like tears falling softly from human eyes. The only thing that can bring joy to the poet is to curl up with a pillow in the bed of a rural cottage. Though the rooms of the cottage may be small and ill-equipped, the sound of raindrops can enable him to recover from his sad and gloomy mood.

Stanza 2

Every tinkle on the shingles ^a
 Has an echo in the heart; ^b
 And a thousand dreamy fancies ^c
 Into busy being start, ^b
 And a thousand recollections ^d
 Weave their air-threads into woof, ^e
 As I listen (to the patter ^f
 Of the rain) upon the roof. ^e

WORD MEANINGS

tinkle	ringing sound
shingles	rectangular tiles used on sloping roofs
echo	reverberation
dreamy fancies into busy being	imaginary stories in my mind
recollections	memories/remembrances
air-threads	dreamy memories
into woof	become entwined

Explanation In this stanza, the poet describes how the raindrops make a tinkling sound as they fall on the shingles of the roof. Each sound made by the rain is repeated the next instant by the beating of his heart. What he has only been imagining till now starts appearing before his eyes. As he is listening to the soft and continuous falling of the raindrops on his roof, all his memories come back to him, but they are not discrete and separated from each other. Instead, these memories have formed a patchwork by becoming entwined with one another. The memories are large in numbers and have formed a cluster in his mind.

Stanza 3

Now in memory comes my mother,
 As she used in years ago,
 To regard the darling dreamers,
 Ere she left them till the dawn:
 O! I feel her fond look on me
 As I list to this refrain
 Which is played upon the shingles
 By the (patter of the rain.)

WORD MEANINGS

in memory comes	I remember
agone	gone by
regard	observe
the darling dreamers	her sleeping children
ere	before
dawn	morning
list	listen
refrain	part of song that is repeated
played upon	the sound coming due to rain falling on

Explanation In this stanza, the poet describes the first memory that he can actually identify among the patchwork of his memories. He remembers that during his childhood, his mother used to look at him and his siblings as they were sleeping and having pleasant dreams. His mother would make a point to look at them every night, for she knew she would not see them again till the next morning. His mother would bend down and watch over him in particular. These memories are evoked as he listens to the repetitive rhythm of the raindrops as they are falling on his roof.

Poetic Devices Used in the Poem

Transferred Epithet A figure of speech in which an epithet (or adjective) grammatically qualifies a noun other than the person or thing it is actually describing.

- (a) **Stanza 1** In this stanza, the poet transfers his melancholic mood from himself to the darkness of the night in which the poem is set.
 (b) **Stanza 1** (Line 1) When the humid shadows hover (the 'humid' property of the clouds is transferred to 'shadows'.)

Personification A figure of speech which is used for an inanimate object or animal/birds look or feel human.

Stanza 1 (Lines 3 - 4) And the melancholy darkness/ gently weeps in the form of rainy tears, (The poet personifies darkness by giving it the human ability to shed tears.)

Refrain A phrase, verse or group of verses repeated at intervals throughout a song or poem, especially at the end of each stanza.

At the end of each stanza, the 'patter of the rain' is repeated.

Metaphor A device which compares two things or qualities which are unlike.

- (a) **Stanza 1** (Line 1) When the humid shadows hover (the word 'shadows' actually means 'clouds'.)
 (b) **Stanza 2** (Lines 13 - 14) And a thousand recollections / weave their bright hues into woof. (The poet compares his memories to a fabric that is being woven with many coloured threads together.)
 (c) **Stanza 3** (Line 18): To survey her darling dreamers. ('Her darling dreamers' is a metaphor for her children who are asleep and probably dreaming).

Onomatopoeia Using a word which suggests the meaning by its sound.

- (a) **In each stanza**, the word 'patter' is used that imitates the real sound of the rain falling.
 (b) **In stanza 2**, the word 'tinkle' is used that imitates the real sound of the rain falling on the shingles of the roof.

Alliteration Repetition of initial consonant sounds in the same line.

Stanza 1 (Line 1) When the humid shadows hover. ('Humid' and 'hover' have the similar first syllable.)

NCERT FOLDER

(Here we have covered questions given in the NCERT textbook along with their answers.)

I *Thinking about the Poem* (Page 42)

1 What do the following phrases mean to you? Discuss in class.

- (i) Humid shadows
- (ii) Starry spheres
- (iii) What a bliss
- (iv) A thousand dreamy fancies into busy being start
- (v) A thousand recollections weave their air-threads into woof

Ans. (i) Shadowy clouds laden with (full of) droplets of rainwater.
(ii) Stars in the sky.
(iii) Utmost joy experienced by the poet.
(iv) This refers to the various imaginary thoughts and fantasies that are aroused in the poet's mind.
(v) This means that numerous (many) memories intermingle to form a beautiful picture that the poet recollects.

2 What does the poet like to do when it rains?

Ans. When it rains, the poet feels delighted to lie with his head pressed against the pillow of his bed in a room of a rural cottage and listen to the patter of the soft rain on the tiles of the cottage roof.

3 What is the single major memory that comes to the poet? Who are the "darling dreamers" he refers to?

Ans. The single major memory that comes to the poet is that of his mother and her fond look. The 'darling dreamers' are the poet and his siblings in their childhood when they were put to sleep by their mother and later on mother used to look at them while they were asleep.

4 Is the poet now a child? Is his mother still alive?

Ans. No, the poet is not a child now. He is a grown up man. He remembers his mother when he is inside his cosy cottage and enjoying the pattern of rain on the roof. His mother is probably not alive, as he says in lines 17-18 that she comes in his memories just like she used to tuck him in his bed to sleep as she used in years ago.

II *Thinking about the Poem* (Page 42)

1 When you were a young child, did your mother tuck you in, as the poet's did?

Ans. Yes, my mother used to tuck me in when I was a young child, just like the poet's mother did. (answers may vary)

2 Do you like rain? What do you do when it rains steadily or heavily as described in the poem?

Ans. Yes, I like rain. When it rains steadily I get into my house and enjoy the weather with family. It is a wonderful experience. I also enjoy eating some tasty snacks and sometimes would love to drench myself in rain. (answers may vary)

3 Does everybody have a cosy bed to lie in when it rains? Look around you and describe how different kinds of people or animals spend time, seek shelter etc, during rain.

Ans. No, everybody is not fortunate enough to have a cosy bed to lie in when it rains. Not everybody gets to enjoy the comfort of cosy homes during rain. I have seen animals seeking shelter under trees and under the tin roofs of small roadside stalls. The people passing by chase away these animals and try to shrink themselves under the limited space of these shops. The poor animals are left to get drenched in the open. The shopkeepers of such stalls are delighted as the people waiting for the rain ask for tea and whatever snacks are available with them. (answers may vary)

Exam Practice

Extract Based Questions

[4 Marks each]

Read the following extracts carefully and choose the correct option.

1 When the humid shadows hover
Over all the starry spheres,
And the melancholy darkness
Gently weeps in rainy tears,
What a bliss to press the pillow
Of a cottage-chamber bed,
And lie listening to the patter
Of the soft rain overhead!

- (i) Why does the poet call melancholy darkness 'weeping'?
- (a) Because of raining in darkness
 - (b) Because of sadness
 - (c) Because of thunderous cries
 - (d) Because of darkness spreading
- (ii) What is a great bliss according to the poet?
- (a) Lying in bed
 - (b) Listening to the sound of raindrops falling on the roof
 - (c) Showers in rain
 - (d) Hailstones
- (iii) What does 'humid shadows' mean here?
- (a) Images of forest
 - (b) Sky
 - (c) Dark rainy clouds
 - (d) Sunlight
- (iv) How does the poet describe the falling of rain?
- (a) Soothing
 - (b) Bursting
 - (c) Crackling
 - (d) Melancholy darkness gently shedding tears

- Ans. (i) (a) Because of raining in darkness
(ii) (b) Listening to the sound of raindrops falling on the roof
(iii) (c) Dark rainy clouds
(iv) (d) Melancholy darkness gently shedding tears

2 What a bliss to press the pillow
Of a cottage – chamber bed
And lie listening to the patter
Of the soft rain overhead!

- (i) Why was it bliss to press the pillow?
- (a) Because of humid shadows
 - (b) Because of scorching heat
 - (c) Because of melancholy darkness
 - (d) Because of pleasing sound of raindrops

- (ii) Why was the rain soft to listen?
- (a) Sounded like a soft melody to the ears
 - (b) It was drizzling
 - (c) Music was being played simultaneously
 - (d) The children were dancing in the rain
- (iii) Which word in the extract means 'being in heaven'?
- (a) Cottage
 - (b) Chamber
 - (c) Bliss
 - (d) Patter
- (iv) Where is the poet during this process?
- (a) On the roof
 - (b) In bed in his room of the cottage
 - (c) In the garden
 - (d) In his mother's room

- Ans. (i) (d) Because of pleasing sound of raindrops
(ii) (a) Sounded like a soft melody to the ears
(iii) (c) Bliss
(iv) (b) In bed in his room of the cottage

3 Every tinkle on the shingles
Has an echo in the heart;
And a thousand dreamy fancies
Into busy being start,
And a thousand recollections
Weave their air-threads into woof,
As I listen to the patter
Of the rain upon the roof.

- (i) What appears when the rain falls on the shingles?
- (a) Tinkling sound creates an echo in the heart
 - (b) Children start dancing in the rain
 - (c) Birds start chirping in the garden
 - (d) Window panes become foggy
- (ii) Why does the mind become busy?
- (a) In listening to the patter
 - (b) In dreaming a thousand fancies
 - (c) In dancing of the children
 - (d) In chirping of the birds
- (iii) Why does the poet's heart echo?
- (a) Because of joy of the children
 - (b) Because of thundering of the clouds
 - (c) Because of tinkling sound of raindrops
 - (d) Because of lightening in the sky
- (iv) What are dreamy fancies of the poet?
- (a) House amid snow peaks
 - (b) Flying over the clouds
 - (c) Dancing in the rain
 - (d) His mother's cuddling, love, affection and fond look

- Ans.** (i) (a) Tinkling sound creates an echo in the heart
 (ii) (b) In dreaming a thousand fancies
 (iii) (c) Because of tinkling sound of raindrops
 (iv) (d) His mother's cuddling, love, affection and fond look

4 Now in memory comes my mother,
 As she used in years ago,
 To regard the darling dreamers,
 Ere she left them till the dawn.
 O! I feel her fond look on me
 As I list to this refrain
 Which is played upon the shingles
 By the patter of the rain.

- (i) Who comes to the poet's memory?
 (a) His mother (b) His father
 (c) His wife (d) His children
- (ii) What is that 'refrain' the poet talks about?
 (a) The sound of chirping of birds
 (b) The sound of falling of raindrops on the roof
 (c) The sound of thundering of clouds
 (d) The sound of strikening of light
- (iii) Which word in the extract means 'wooden pieces'?
 (a) Agone (b) Ere
 (c) Shingles (d) Patter
- (iv) Which poetic device has been used in the stanza?
 (a) Repetition (b) Hyperbole
 (c) Simile (d) Metaphor

- Ans.** (i) (a) His mother
 (ii) (b) The sound of falling of raindrops on the roof
 (iii) (c) Shingles
 (iv) (d) Metaphor

5 Now in memory comes my mother,
 As she used in years ago,
 To regard the darling dreamers,
 Ere she left them till the dawn.
 (i) What memory comes to the poet's mind?
 (a) Mother's face
 (b) Father's anger
 (c) Wife's love
 (d) Children's innocence

- (ii) Who are darling dreamers in the extract?
 (a) Parents
 (b) Children
 (c) Siblings
 (d) Town people
- (iii) What do the words 'till the dawn' mean here?
 (a) Late evening (b) Early morning
 (c) The whole day (d) Day and night
- (iv) Name the poem and the poet.
 (a) The Road Not Taken—Robert Frost
 (b) Wind—S Bharati
 (c) The Lake Isle of Innisfree—WB Yeats
 (d) Rain on the Roof—Coates Kinney

- Ans.** (i) (a) Mother's face
 (ii) (c) Siblings
 (iii) (b) Early morning
 (iv) (d) Rain on the Roof—Coates Kinney

6 Ere she left them till the dawn:
 O! I feel her fond look on me
 As I list to this refrain
 Which is played upon the shingles
 By the patter of the rain.

- (i) Who is 'she' in the above lines?
 (a) The rain
 (b) The poet's mother
 (c) The lightening
 (d) The poet's sister
- (ii) What does the poet listen to?
 (a) Chirping of birds
 (b) Thundering of clouds
 (c) Singing of the children in the rain
 (d) Sound of the rain
- (iii) Which word in the extract means 'rectangular wooden tiles used on the roofs'?
 (a) Shingles (b) Refrain
 (c) Patter (d) Ere
- (iv) Whom did she leave till the dawn?
 (a) Shingles (b) Bird's chirping
 (c) Her children (d) Her memories

- Ans.** (i) (b) The poet's mother
 (ii) (d) Sound of the rain
 (iii) (a) Shingles
 (iv) (c) Her children

Short Answer (SA) Type Questions

[2 Marks each]

1 What does 'melancholy darkness' (in the poem 'Rain on the Roof') mean and what does it do?

Ans. Darkness has always been associated with sadness by poets. It is due to the rain clouds and it causes rain to fall, just like melancholy causes weeping or crying. It becomes quite gloomy when it rains as there is no sunshine.

2 What does the poet consider 'a bliss'?

Ans. When it rains, the poet lies in his cosy bed in a cottage, listening to the melody of nature. He listens to the pleasant pattering sound of the rain on the roof of the cottage, which is a bliss for him.

3 When do the 'thousand dreamy fancies' begin in the poet's heart?

Ans. The 'thousand dreamy fancies' begin in the poet's heart when the sound of the rain falling on the shingles has an echo in his heart and he responds by dreaming fanciful dreams. He is flooded with memories of his childhood and his mother.

4 When does the poet remember his mother? What does it show about him?

Ans. The poet remembers his mother when he listens to the patter of the rain on the roof. He feels her fond look on him. It shows that he was very fond of his mother. He remembers how she used to see them all whether they are properly tucked or not.

5 What does the poet want to convey when he says 'when the humid shadows hover over all the starry spheres'?

Ans. The poet wants to convey that when the dark rain clouds ('humid shadows') cover the whole sky so that the stars ('starry spheres') are not visible, it is a sign that rain is going to start. The poet compares darkness with sadness or these humid clouds resulting in rain.

6 What kind of refrain is the poet referring to when he says, 'As I list to this refrain'?

Ans. The refrain the poet is referring to is the repeated pattering sound of the rain on the tiled roof of the cottage in which he is lying in his cosy bed. The falling showers create a music or raindrops fall rhythmically.

7 What does the poet dream of?

Ans. When it rains, the poet feels an echo in his heart. He experiences many dreamy fancies in his heart and memories of the past come rushing to his mind. He finally dreams about his dead mother and memories of childhood.

8 What is 'bliss' for the poet in the poem 'Rain on the Roof'?

Ans. The poet loves rain, as it brings back his childhood memories. Listening to the sound of rain pattering on the roof is the ultimate happiness for him. When it comes, he lies in his cosy bed and enjoys nature's melodies. This is bliss for him.

9 What thoughts appear in poet's mind when it rains?

Ans. The rain has an echo in the poet's heart. He experiences many dreamy fancies in his heart. His heart is filled with a thousand memories, both sweet and sad.

10 How does the poet describe the movement before rain?

Ans. The dark wet shadows of clouds hover over the sky. The stars become spheres. They are covered by these clouds. There is darkness all around and atmosphere becomes very gloomy.

Long Answer (LA) Type Questions

[8 Marks each]

1 What is the message conveyed by the poem 'Rain on the Roof'?

Ans. The poet wants to convey the message that nature too exhibits its grief and pleasure. First he says that the dark rain clouds float in the air and cover the starry sky. The sky has been shining with stars, but is now covered and appears dark. It shows the anxiety or unhappiness of the sky.

Then the raindrops fall like tears due to sadness. But the pattering of the rain gives pleasure to the poet who has been lying in a room. The poet becomes lost in old memories while listening to the musical pattering of the rain. It creates echoes in his heart. He remembers his mother in his dreams. Even when the rain stops, he feels the benevolent look of his mother.

2 How can you say that the poet loved his mother very much?

Ans. When it rains, the poet lies in his bed in the cottage and old memories come rushing back to him. He remembers his mother and recalls how his mother used to tell him stories while putting him to bed as a child. The poet has very fond memories of his mother looking after him and his siblings while they were asleep. She was very particular to tuck her children in their beds and visit them after they had fallen asleep, to check that they were sleeping comfortably. The author admired this habit of his mother. This shows that he loved his mother very much.

3 How can you say that the poet was a home loving, family loving and nature loving person? How does he display these values in the poem?

Ans. In the first stanza the poet says that it was the ultimate happiness ('bliss') for him to hear the rain pattering on the roof. He says that he is lying on his bed in a room in a cottage.

Cottages are made in rural areas, i.e. areas which are close to nature, showing that he was nature loving. In the second stanza he starts dreaming memories of the past at home as the rain falls, showing that he is a home loving person. In the third stanza he remembers his mother with fondness, showing that he is a family loving person.

4 Do you think that rain is a narrative tool in the poet's life? What happens when the poet listens to the patter of the rain?

Ans. When raindrops fall on the tiles of the roof, a certain kind of music is created in the form of pitter-patter. For the poet, this music is blissful. Every rain drop creates a rhythm with the poet's heartbeat. The poet loves to listen to this sound and also indulge in the recollection of fond memories of childhood.

Rain serves as a powerful narrative tool in the poet's life as rain bears a subtle link with all aspects of life. It has added a layer of depth and fullness to the situation where the poet is concerned. It delivers an effective voice which communicates the right moments of time and space as well as the emotions of the protagonist in a very touching manner than mere words could do.

Self Assessment

Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and choose the correct option.

- 1 When the humid shadows hover
Over all the starry spheres,
And the melancholy darkness
Gently weeps in rainy tears,
- (i) Why is the darkness weeping?
☒ (a) It is raining in the darkness (b) It is lightening in the darkness
(c) The atmosphere is full of sadness (d) The poet is remembering his mother
- (ii) What are starry spheres?
☒ (a) Striking of lightening (b) Thundering of clouds
(c) The star embedded sky (d) Drizzling of rain
- (iii) Which word in the extract means 'linger'?
(a) Humid ☒ (b) Hover (c) Spheres (d) Melancholy
- (iv) What does the phrase 'humid shadows hover' mean in the extract?
(a) Starry horizon (b) Foggy night
☒ (c) Humid atmosphere ☒ (d) Rain-filled dark clouds
- 2 Now in memory comes my mother,
As she used in years ago,
To regard the darling dreamers,
Ere she left them till the dawn:
- (i) Why is the poet remembering his mother?
☒ (a) For her cuddling, love and affection (b) For her deliciously cooked food
(c) For her making him bath in the rain (d) For her scolding on being wet in the rain
- (ii) Who are the darling dreamers?
(a) The poet's parents ☒ (b) The poet's siblings (c) The poet's children (d) The poet's pets
- (iii) Which word in the extract means 'long past'?
(a) Memory ☒ (b) Years ago (c) Ere (d) Dawn
- (iv) Describe the mood of the poet while remembering his mother?
(a) Angry (b) Regretful ☒ (c) Sad (d) Playful

Short Answer (SA) Type Questions

- 3 How does the poet feel when the clouds blot out the stars?
- 4 How does the poet know when it is a sign for the rain to start?
- 5 How does the poet describe the rain when it starts falling?
- 6 What are the 'thousand dreamy fancies' in the poet's heart?
- 7 Why does the sound of rain falling on the shingles echo in the poet's heart?
- 8 In, 'As I list to this refrain' what is the refrain that the poet is referring to here?

Long Answer (LA) Type Questions

- 9 Give the substance of what the poet is wanting to say in the poem.
- 10 Dreams hold importance in the poet's life. Is it true? Elaborate.