

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 5: THE BALL POEM



THE BALL POEM

~Summary~

-by John Berryman

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!
No use to say "O there are other balls":

Explanation: The poem is about a little boy. For the first time in his young life, he is learning what it is like to experience grief at the loss of a much loved possession, that is, his ball. The ball is here symbolic of the sweet memories of his childhood. The boy loses his ball and watches it bouncing down the street into the water. To us, the loss of a ball is of minor consequence but to the little boy, it was a valued possession. The poet here, deters himself from saying that there are other balls because the boy wants the same ball. The ball had been with him for a long time and it was linked to the memories of the days when he played with it. The boy's ball personifies his young days and happy innocence.

Stanza- 2

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. I would not intrude on him;
A dime, another ball, is worthless.



Explanation: When the young boy loses his ball, it bounces away and lands in the harbour. The boy is very much troubled at the loss of his ball and plunges into grief. He stands stiff and trembling while staring at his ball. He is upset as he looks into the gloomy water because he cannot find the ball. The boy is deeply affected by the loss of his ball because it has been with him for a long time. When the ball bounces into the water all his memories of the childhood days flashes in front of him. This leads to a realisation that those poet doesn't offer him money to buy another ball because that would be worthless.

Stanza- 3

..... Now
He senses first responsibility
In a world of possessions. People will take
Balls, balls will be lost always, little boy.
And no one buys a ball back. Money is external.

Explanation: The boy is upset when he looks into the gloomy water because he cannot find the ball. This is when he gets his first sense of responsibility. The poet suggests that from the loss of the ball, the boy is learning what it means to lose something in a world of possessions where he will lose things, will buy some more to replace the ones lost, but would never be able to buy back the thing that he had lost. In this poem, the boy's ball personifies his young days and happy innocence. The poet, thus, makes the boy understand about his responsibility as the loss is immaterial. Money is external as it cannot buy memories, nor can it replace the things that we love, the things that really matter.

Stanza- 4

He is learning, well behind his desperate eyes,
This epistemology of loss, how to stand up
Knowing what every man must one day know
And most know many days, how to stand up.



Explanation: The poet suggests that from the loss of the ball the boy is learning how to stand up in a world of possessions. The boy is learning what it means to lose something. The poet says that knowing that every man has to stand up after such losses, the boy too will learn how to stand up and leave the losses behind as he would have understood the true meaning and nature of loss.

Conclusion of The Ball Poem

This poem successfully describes how we may feel to lose something that we love and grow up eventually without it.



NCERT SOLUTION

Questions (Page No. 47)

(THINKING ABOUT THE POEM)

Question 1: Why does the poet say, “I would not intrude on him”? Why doesn’t he offer him money to buy another ball?

Answer: The poet says, “I would not intrude on him” because he wants the boy to learn from the experience of loss. This will teach the boy that loss is also an important part of life, hence the poet does not intervene in the boy’s natural process of learning. He also doesn’t offer the boy money to buy another ball because the lesson of loss learnt from this experience would become worthless and wouldn’t teach the little one to learn the lesson of responsibility from this situation.

Question 2: “... staring down/All his young days into the harbour where/His ball went ...” Do you think the boy has had the ball for a long time? Is it linked to the memories of days when he played with it?

Answer: Yes, it appears that the boy has had the ball for a long time. When it bounced and fell into the water, all his childhood memories of wonderful days flashed in front of his eyes. He realised that those moments would never come back, just as the ball. He felt that he can buy new balls and those would create new memories or moments for him, but those that are gone with the ball into the water would never ever return.

Question 3: What does “in the world of possessions” mean?

Answer: “In the world of possessions” refers to the world consisting of materialistic things. Different people possess different things such as land, property, money, or any other valuable thing. In the poem, the poet indicates that losing of the ball by the boy may be a very small thing, but this would give him a realization of loss and the experience of losing memories associated with it.

Question 4: Do you think the boy has lost anything earlier? Pick out the words that suggest the answer.

Answer: No, it seems that the boy did not lose anything earlier. It is evident from the words ‘He senses first responsibility in a world of possessions’. This line suggests that the sense of loss gave him an experience of understanding how several precious moments are lost with the loss of a particular object.

Question 5: What does the poet say the boy is learning from the loss of the ball? Try to explain



this in your own words.

Answer: The poet tries to convey through his poem that the boy has learnt an important lesson to cope up with the loss of his ball. He is experiencing grief and sadness while he grows up in this world full of possessions. He learns that there are several important things in life that are lost and cannot be brought back. He also senses his first sense of responsibility as he loses the ball. The boy learns to stand up and leave the loss behind as he moves ahead in his life and understands the true meaning and nature of loss.

Question 6: Have you ever lost something you liked very much? Write a paragraph describing how you felt then, and saying whether — and how — you got over your loss.

Answer: Yes, I had lost my pet dog in a road accident when he was just five years old. One day I was playing with my puppy with a ball in my garden. I threw the ball in the air while playing with him, my dog jumped to catch the ball but it bounced back and rolled to the street nearby. As my dog went to fetch the ball, a speeding car ran over my puppy and I could hear it crying in pain. I rushed to the spot and found my pup covered in blood. I rushed him to the hospital immediately but it was too late and he was bleeding profusely and succumbed to injuries. I was very upset and grief-stricken by this incident. With due course of time, I recovered from my loss, but that incident is fresh in my memories and I still love my dog and miss him dearly.

