

English Core- Class 12 - Book Flamingo

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers: Salient Features Module 1/1

Adrienne Cecile Rich was a widely influential poet during the second half of the 20th century

"Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" is a 1951 poem which appeared in her first published book of poems, *A Change of World*.

Theme: Constraints of marriage and women's experiences and struggle under the patriarchal system.

In other words it depicts the pathetic condition of married women and their constraints under male chauvinism.

The poem is critical of male dominant world and criticises men for oppressing women.

The first stanza opens with Aunt Jennifer's visual tapestry of tigers that are unafraid in their habitat.

The denizens or the citizens of green forest, the tigers, in bright shining topaz yellow prance and jump across the screen is the scene embroidered and created by Aunt Jennifer with her own hands in the panel.

Though unreal, the bright crystalline topaz coloured tigers are seen confidently pouncing with cinch certainty and certitude.

Tigers are well aware of their agility and ability, power and prowess and are seldom scared of potential armed men as they are ferocious fighters.

Tigers represent power and potency, strength and fearlessness they wield among the world of animals and evoke an image that these royal and regal tigers are indomitable in their arena.

Tigers have a smooth, robust, blithe movement that shows their fluidity of motion and they demonstrate and display elegance and grace, energy and chivalry.

The second stanza portrays Aunt Jennifer's toils, trials, travails troubles and tribulations to make tigers on the tapestry, a hand woven or embroidered decorative fabric.

As she prepares her panel tapestry, using shiny silken thread, she struggles, struts and frets and her hands nervously flutter.

The creative skills of Aunt Jennifer's fingers flutter because of the burden of oppression that even the smooth slim ivory needle finds it hard to move through the silken smooth fabric.

Her terrified hands reveal her unhappy married life filled with sufferings and hardships with no freedom to pursue even her hobby or pastime engagement.

The heavy weight of the marriage band that bonded her with, sits heavily upon her hand and she is tied down by the weight.

Aunt Jennifer underwent physical and mental trauma, ordeals and unpleasantness.

She was nearly a slave to her husband who was the master of the house, living a fearful, frail, silent and dependent life

Her inner free spirit has been jailed by the patriarchal society and especially of the dominance of her male counterpart, her husband,

The Final part reveals an Aunt Jennifer who is weak, meek, and feeble and enslaved who is contrary to the tigers she was knitting on the handiwork.

The Third Stanza highlights Aunt Jennifer's desire for freedom, fearlessness and independence which will remain alive even after her death in the form of prancing tigers which she embroidered.

Matrimonial woes, extensive oppression by customs and law, all enforced her to be like a slave to the master of the house and never a mistress.

Moreover, she wears the wedding / engagement ring which brings in a lot of responsibilities and she is bound by responsibilities galore.

Just because of the Wedding Band she had to perform everything under fear factor and lives a life of abject subjugation, losing her individuality.

The metaphorical weight of marriage bond implies that stress and strain pressures and problems she underwent prevented a life she wanted to live.

She wants to live the life of a tiger for herself and reveals it through her creation.

Her sketches and stitching of tigers represent her dream and desire for a free spirit emphasising the fact that she pines for freedom.

Aunt Jennifer is a typical victim of male oppression who lost her dignity and personal freedom, but the tragedy is that her husband's reign over her will not be over even after her death.

She tries to create an alternative world of freedom to escape from her grim marriage - a world that she longs for. Aunt tries to find an escape route and takes refuge in her craft portraying pouncing tigers.

Poetic Devices:

Symbols: (a) Uncle, (b) Aunt, (c) Tigers, (d) Wedding band, (e) Aunt Jennifer's hand.

Symbolism Tigers: Untamed free spirit, Embroidery Creative expression
Heavy wedding band: Symbolises oppression in an unhappy marriage.

Imagery: The poem opens with vibrant imagery describing the tigers pictured in Aunt Jennifer's craftwork. Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.

Irony—(a) a weak and submissive woman weaving a picture of tigers that are strong and fearless.(b) brutal tigers are depicted chivalric and the cultured man is depicted as an oppressor.(c) Even when the creator dies, her work will continue to exist.

It is ironical that a woman in such bondage creates such unafraid sleek and proud tiger pouncing even after her death.

Contrast: the characteristics of Aunt Jennifer and that of the tiger.

Hyperbole: Deliberate Exaggeration. The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band.

Consonance: The use of the /z/ sounds in the phrase "topaz denizens" .

Synecdoche and transferred epithet—terrified hands' representing her being terrified

Alliteration: Repetition of initial consonant sounds e.g. fingers fluttering, prancing, proud.....

Personification: The tigers are personified throughout the poem when they are described as being proud, confident, and unafraid of men. ...

Rhyme scheme: aa bb cc

Metaphor: Bright topaz denizens of a world of green. The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band (Here weight of wedding band is metaphor).

Paradox: Here a trembling and 'mastered' woman creates free and confident creatures in her artistic endeavours. 'Fluttering' fingers produce something that has 'certainty'