

CLASS 10 ENGLISH CORE
BOOK: FIRST FLIGHT

POEM : ANIMALS BY WALT WHITMAN

Module 1/1

HANDOUT

Poet : Walt Whitman was born on 31st May, 1819 and he passed away on 26th March, 1892. He was an acclaimed American Poet, Essayist and Journalist. He is generally regarded as the father of Free Verse. Among his most popular poems are - ‘O Captain! My Captain!’, ‘O Me! O Life!’, ‘Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking’, ‘I Hear America Singing’, Leaves of Grass, Song of Myself, etc.

About Poem: The poet expresses his will to turn to animals in the poem as he finds animals far better than human beings. He finds human beings as greedy and jealous by disposition. According to the poet, animals are calm and composed and they are self-controlled. Owing to their virtues, the poet desires the company of animals.

Explanation:

Walt Whitman feels like living in the world of animals. Their world attracts him a lot due to their qualities. They are the sole owners of virtues like peacefulness and self-restraint. These two virtues/qualities are no longer the ornaments of humans. The poet admires animals as they are free from greed for worldly possessions and achievements. According to the poet, greed is rampant in the lives of human beings. He is fascinated by the self-contained nature of animals. They do not interfere in the lives of others and they are satisfied in their own lives. These special traits make the poet feel amazed at them and so he stares long and long at them.

Human beings have several reasons for despair and despondency. They grumble for every minor issue. On the contrary, the poet does not find animals cry out for the things they lose. Animals neither get involved in misdeeds nor do they have regret for anything. They keep their sorrows unto themselves. They do not lie like humans; instead they are very much truthful. The poet misses any boastful talk among animals. Human beings brag a lot even of their duty to the Almighty. He dislikes the boastfulness of human beings as they indulge themselves in exhibiting their good deeds and religiousness. This imprudent nature of human beings has the sole purpose of winning people’s applause and popularity. The poet abhors this aspect of human beings; and for want of this undesirable nature, Walt Whitman admires animals. Animals are never dissatisfied like humans. They are contented with whatever they have and they are never seen crazy about worldly possessions and comforts.

Walt Whitman does not find any hierarchy in world of animals. No one has inferiority or superiority complex in them. There is no one more important or insignificant because in their world no animal is more respectable than another animal. They are not bound to bow down to any other animal. There is no issue of poverty or affluence in the realm of animals. All together, they practice the principle of equality. Happiness and sorrow are equal in their view. Unlike humans, they are never extremely happy or sad. They lead a balanced life. They do not need to show their devotion to the Almighty. They are honest in exhibiting their relations to other animals and they show what they are.

Having observed all these characteristics in animals, Walt Whitman takes to contemplation as to where from animals have got all those wonderful qualities. He wonders where he has lost those qualities. He thinks human beings did possess those virtues/qualities viz. truthfulness, innocence, kindness etc. He concludes that human beings abandoned them all with time and these virtues turned over to the animals.
