

Chapter – 4 Telephone Conversation

Understanding The Poem

Q1. State the central issue in the poem.

Answer. The central idea of the poem is related to racism and color discrimination. The dark reality of poem is showed when a person asking for shelter is asked about his skin color instead of the rent. The poem depicts what whole Africa believes in and what disadvantages men face there. The color issue is a big issue that is the main ideology of Africans.

Q2. There are intervals of silence in the interaction between the landlady and the prospective tenant. What are the reasons for this?

Answer. The conversation between landlady and tenant is paused and she inquires about his skin color, that how dark he is. The tenants reply made her feel inferior and to cover up she attacked him on his skin color. The landlady is racist in her thoughts.

Q3. How is colour highlighted in the poem and why? List all the words in the poem that suggest colour.

Answer. There are various colors that are used in the poem to represent various aspects. The red color is used in various things like a telephone booth, double-tiered bus, pillar box. The tenant is dark-skinned and landlady The gold rolled is used to signify link with rich people. Various colors like red, black, white, gold-toned are used in the poem to represent.

Q4. Which are the lines in the poem that impressed you the most and why?

Answer. ‘West African Sepia’ is the phrase which impressed the most. This phrase is the reply by tenant to landlady. When landlady says about his skin tone he gives a befitting reply that this shows the tiny mindset of fair skin toned people. With this poet raises problem of color discrimination. In this poem, Soyinka says a person should be judged on his values and ethics and not the skin tone.

Q5. You know what ‘hide-and-seek’ is. What would ‘hide-and-speak’ mean?

Answer. The term hide and seek is connected to black people, because of their complexion makes them feel inferior and low, while white skin people raise themselves above while dark skin tone. In childhood hide and seek was a game played by kids they would hide and would find them.

Q6. Certain words in the poem are in capital letters—why?

Answer. Words in the poem which are in capital letters are as follows: HOW DARK? ,

ARE YOU LIGHT? , OR VERY DARK? , OR VERY LIGHT? This poem tells about the color discrimination that is commonly practised in Africa. The treatment of lady to tenant is highly racist. The poem shows mindset of white skin people who do treat black skin as inferior. The letters in bold is the statement by lady on knowing how dark the tenant was and tenant gives a befitting reply to the people.

Q7. Why do you think that the poet has chosen the title 'Telephone Conversation'? If you were to suggest another title for the poem, what would it be?

Answer. The poet had chosen a title 'Telephone Conversation' because he wants to tell how the plot moves ahead and the whole conversation takes place on the telephone call. As soon as landlady came to know that the tenant was dark-skinned she started inquiring about his appearance. I would give a title "Racist mindset." I have given this title to show that because racism exists in the mind not the skin of other human beings.

Understanding The Poem [a]

Q8. The power of poetry lies in suggestion and understatement. Discuss this with reference to the poem.

Answer. [a] Understatement is a literary device that presents statement less important than actually it is. The poem is trying to tell that color is not the ultimate guide to judge a person. The conversation between lady and tenant states that still people judge a book by its cover rather than the content inside.