

A Photograph Summary Class 11th English



By Shirley Toulson

The poem, 'A photograph', contrasts the eternal state of nature and the transitory state of human beings. The poet describes a photograph that captures interesting moments of her mother's childhood when she went for a sea holiday with her two girl cousins Betty and Dolly. The poet draws a contrast between nature, changing at a snail's pace and the fast-changing human life.

The poet recalls how her mother laughed at the photograph and felt disappointed at the loss of her childhood joys. The sea holiday was her mother's past at that time, while her mother's laughter is the poet's past now. With great difficulty and at different periods of time, both reconcile with their respective losses and the pain involved in recollecting the past. For the poet, the death of her mother brings great sadness and an acute sense of loss. The painful 'silence' of the situation leaves her with no words to express her grief. Thus, the 'silence silences' her.

The three stanzas of the poem depict three different stages of life i.e. early adolescence (girlhood), adulthood and death.

A. Infer the meanings of the following words from the context:

paddling, transient

Answer:

'Paddling' means 'wading' or 'rowing' a boat.

'Transient' means temporary.

Answer the following Questions :-

Question 1:

What does the word 'cardboard' denote in the poem? Why has this word been used?

Answer:

The word cardboard denotes the photograph pasted on a hard thick paper. This word has been used to refer to a practice in the past when photographs were pasted on cardboard and framed with glass front to preserve them.

Question 2:

What has the camera captured?

Answer:

The camera has captured the three girls—the poet's mother and her two cousins, Betty and Dolly, in their swimming dresses with the poet's mother in the middle and the two cousins on either side holding her hands and walking v feet in sea water.

Question 3:

What has not changed over the years? Does this suggest something to you?

Answer:

The sea has not changed over the years. Its waves are as fresh, shining and tireless as they were years ago. The changelessness of sea reminds us of the changes in human face with advancing age.

Question 4:

The poetess's mother laughed at the snapshot? What did this laugh indicate?

Answer:

This laugh' indicated her joy at remembering an incident connected with her past life, when she was quite young and free from the tensions and worries of life.

Question 5:

What is the meaning of the line "Both wry with the laboured ease of loss".

Answer:

The sea holiday and the laughter of the poet's mother are incidents of the past. There is a sense of loss associated with them. Both are amusing yet disappointing as the state of feeling comfortable or relaxed is unnatural or forced one. This sense of loss is quite painful to bear.

Question 6:

What does 'this circumstance' refer to?

Answer:

This circumstance refers to the death of the poet's mother.

Question 7:

The three stanzas depict three different phases. Name them.

Answer:

1. The girlhood of the poet's mother—the period before the birth of the poet.
2. Her middle age—the period during the childhood of the poet
3. Period after the death of the poet's mother.