

Animals

Thinking about the Poem (Page 84)

Question 1:

Notice the use of the word 'turn' in the first line, "I think I could turn and live with animals...". What is the poet turning from?

Answer:

The poet is turning away from human beings to live with animals because he thinks animals are calm, self-contained and have a non-complaining nature. On the contrary, he feels humans are complicated and false in comparison to animals.

Question 2:

Mention three things that humans do and animals don't.

Answer:

According to the poet, here we outline the three things that humans do and animals don't:

1. Humans complain about small things and are always dissatisfied. On the other hand, animals are non-complaining creatures who are satisfied with whatever they have.
2. Human beings sweat and work hard to earn their living and they whine about their condition always whereas, animals are placid creatures and do not sulk about their condition at any time.
3. Humans are fond of materialistic things as this makes them happy. On the contrary, animals are non-demanding creatures and do not behave irrationally to possess worldly pleasures.

Question 3:

Do humans kneel to other humans who lived thousands of years ago? Discuss this in groups.

Answer:

Yes, humans kneel to other humans who lived thousands of years ago due to cultural traditions or religious beliefs. They fold their hands in humility and worship their ancestors to show respect by kneeling down in front of their portraits.

(Note: Students can discuss and share their own cultural beliefs with their classmates and also be aware of religious practices of other cultures at the same time.)

Question 4:

What are the 'tokens' that the poet says he may have dropped long ago, and which the animals have kept for him? Discuss this in class. (Hint: Whitman belongs to the Romantic tradition that includes Rousseau and Wordsworth, which holds that civilization has made humans false to their own true nature. What could be the basic aspects of our nature as living beings that humans choose to ignore or deny?)

Answer:

The tokens mentioned by Whitman in the poem indicate the symbols of the true nature of human beings. He intends to convey that as civilization flourished, humans lost their natural instincts and moved away from the tokens of virtue such as containment, honesty and innocence. They became more self-centred and the desire to possess worldly pleasures took over their minds. They lost their humane touch in due course of time. On the contrary, animals have always carried forward their real instincts and continue to do so. The poet looks at those characteristics and wonders where he had negligently lost his true nature.

