

Poem No.

5

In the Street of the Fruit Stalls

(Jan Stallworthy)

Wicks balance flame, a dark dew falls
In the street of the fruit stalls
Melon, guava, mandarin,
Pyramid-piled like cannon balls,
Glow red-hot, gold-hot, from within.

Dark children with a coin to spend
Enter the lantern's orbit; find
Melon, guava, mandarin—
The moon compacted to a rind,
The sun in a pitted skin.

They take it, break it open, let
A gold or silver fountain wet
Mouth, fingers, cheek, nose, chin:
Radiant as lanterns, they forget
The dark street I am standing in.

Theme

This is a symbolic poem. The world is threatened with war, misery and poverty. But all these have failed to crush man's love for pleasure. Children enjoy the sweet spray of the juice forgetting all about the misery they live in.

Paraphrase

It is evening time. It is wet and dark. There is a street of fruit sellers where various fruit are piled up in a conical form. They reflect hot, red and golden colours which in dim lantern light look like bombs. Poor children come there with a coin and stand in the light of the lanterns. They look at melon, guava and other fruit. Their mouths water. They pick up a fruit and break it open. Juice comes out and pours itself into their mouths, and also sticks on their fingers and cheeks. They enjoy the fruit, and are least conscious of their surroundings.

Glossary

guava	fruit of a tropical tree with a light yellow skin and pink or white edible flesh
mandarin	a type of small orange with a loose skin
rind	the hard outer skin of certain fruits
wick	a piece of cord or tape in a candle, oil lamp, etc.
pyramid	a large stone structure with a flat square or triangular base and sloping sides that meet in a point at the top

EXERCISES

1. Choose the correct answer.

i. Which fruit has not been mentioned in the poem?

- a) mango b) melon
c) guava d) mandarin

ii. The fruit resembled the _____.

- a) vegetables b) cannon balls
c) bullets d) biscuits

iii. It was a _____ street.

- a) dark b) bright
c) airy d) blind

iv. The children were _____.

- a) pale b) dark
c) white d) yellow

2. Mark the statements true / false.

- i. No fruit has been mentioned in the poem. T/F
ii. The children did not want to buy the fruit. T/F
iii. The children were holding coins in their hands. T/F
iv. They ate the fruit with relish. T/F

3. Add two more rhyming words to each of the words given below.

- i. falls , _____ , _____
ii. spend , _____ , _____

iii. skin , _____ , _____

iv. forget , _____ , _____

4. Write down the missing word in each verse.

i. Wicks balance flame, a dark dew _____.

- a) falls b) calls
c) moves d) comes

ii. Pyramid-piled like cannon _____.

- a) bullets b) balls
c) guns d) spears

iii. The sun in a pitted _____.

- a) skin b) rim
c) arm d) leg

iv. The dark street I am standing _____.

- a) out b) in
c) into d) on

5. Write a critical note on the poem.

6. Give a summary of the poem in your own words.

7. What are the feelings of the poet standing in the dark?

8. Why has the poet used 'cannon balls' to describe the fruit?

9. Paraphrase the last stanza in your own words.

10. Make a list of fruits described in the poem.
