

Desiderata

by Max Ehrmann

1. (a) Analyse the poem 'Desiderata' and examine how the poet connects humans with the universe in the poem?

Answer: The poet, Max Ehrmann has evoked some beautiful concepts and brought forth the goodness in life through this poem. While showing his appreciation for the good things in life, he also leaves the reader with a number of important lessons. The poet talks about staying close to things and to those people who bring positivity to our lives and also advises to abstain from being with those who bring negativity. According to him, negative people are vexations that cause hindrance to our development and progress. In order to excite the reader's spirit, the poet connects it with the infinite universe. The poet tells us that we are children of the universe who are as much part of it as the stars and the trees. Our existence is natural and organized like their existence. This Earth is a place designed and decorated for us and we have all the right to be on it. There can be no question of anyone being an outsider or unwanted. Everyone here is welcome to call it their home and enjoy their life. The poet says that 'the universe is folding which probably is a reference to the continued existence of the elements and the unhindered progress of all beings that live on Earth and elsewhere. The poet establishes an excellent connection with the universe, which gives a severely needed boost to the ego of a distressed person. When a person is unhappy or broken by the trials of life, at such a moment if he/she experiences to be in harmony with something as great and vast as the universe, it gives a lot of strength and faith to the spirit. Being one with the ever-expanding and the unimaginably infinite universe gives a much-needed dose of confidence to the crestfallen.

(b) Does the poem teach us appreciation only of the good? What does it tell us about behaving with the ignorant?

Answer: The poem teaches us to appreciate all the good things around us. But it doesn't restrict appreciation only to the good things. It also says that we should appreciate the things that we generally dislike. For example, the passage of time and aging are concepts that have caused great distress to people. In the poem, the poet says that we should calmly

surrender to the fact that is aging. Many people are scared about their growing age and this causes them undue stress. The poem suggests we should take things as they come and cherish them to the fullest. That will help us a great deal in enjoying our life. Our lives need to be filled with positivity about everything in it, especially those things which are not in our control. The poet feels that one should listen and pay heed even to the dull and ignorant because they too have their stories and versions of the truth. One can learn even from the ignorant. Normally, it would be considered vague to pay heed to the ignorant but it is indeed a wise thing to hear them out as well. We should not be arrogant or ignorant of those who are ignorant of us. Everybody has a reason for what they think, do and knowing those reasons may give us a completely new point of view on many things.

(c) Explain the meaning of the line, "be gentle with yourself"?

Answer: The poet gives ample lessons on living life in a satisfactory and beautiful way. The poet says that one needs to be gentle with oneself in times of hardships. Often sufferings and undesired events take place in our life. These things are not in our hands to control but we can surely control the way these things affect our lives. During days when one is feeling very low or depressed, one should let go of the negativity and the gloomy thoughts that may collect in their minds. The poet mentions that during times of loneliness and desolation a person feels that they are completely alone and their sufferings are only theirs to bear, they tend to think too much about the consequences. He also tells us to strengthen our spirit so that tribulations don't break us. When times go harsh, we end up thinking about the darker side of things which affects our mental health and causes unnecessary trouble for us. In such cases, the poet advises us to be gentle with ourselves and let things go. Taking too much stress does not solve problems and rather causes even more difficulties. We forget that we are mere humans and can hardly change our destinies, because of which we overwork ourselves. This is why the poet suggests that humans should try their bit and not put too much pressure on themselves.

Long Questions and Answers

1. What message(s) does the poem 'Desiderata' convey to its reader?

Answer: Max Ehrmann was an American writer, poet, and philosopher famously known for

his prose poem 'Desiderata'. Nearly every line in the poem flashes messages on human life. The poem lists situations and suggestions that guide people. While it doesn't entirely play as a guide for the readers, yet a significant role is played by the poem, which conveys that man must be able to find their own solutions to problems. The speaker also suggests that one should not entertain people who are inclined to behave in an ill-willed mannered. The speaker also adds that a person should not compare himself to another person. One should cherish whatever shortcomings or blessings a person may have and try to make the most of it. Next, the speaker says that one must be focused on his or her own endeavor and be cautioned in dealing with other people. As a person matures in age, they should treasure all experiences that were encountered and learn from each other. Whenever adversity strikes, a person must have faith that the obstacles in life will be surpassed.

Max Ehrmann's work reminds people to listen to their inner voice and to understand that all people are struggling with their own troubles. The messages that are conveyed in the poem are:

- **Learn to get along with others.**
- **Enjoy your achievements.**
- **Be gentle with yourselves.**
- **Be fearless.**
- **Be as posed.**
- **Strive to be happy.**

The poem leads its readers through the various situations in life and exhibits the needs for the readers to follow and remember the values described.

**2. "You are a child of the universe
no less than the trees and the stars;
you have a right to be here.
And whether or not it is clear to you,
no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should."**

Explain the meaning of this extract. Relate it to the theme of the poem. You may use the points below for reference.

- **companions, the importance of togetherness**
- **features reflecting nature**
- **exploration and discovery as time passes and with support**
- **creates hope and encourages people to work for what they love**

Answer: The stanza from the poem tells the reader, their importance and the role they play in the world. Being "a child of the universe" signifies company and experience of every person in the world. A child has a lot to learn and is curious about discovering the world they live in. People are like children of the universe who try to unravel secrets of the ever-expanding universe. They are just as beautiful, capable, attractive and valued to the universe like the trees which mean life to all the living organisms of the world and the stars that always remain to support people in times of despair, and encourage them to dream, enabling them to discover a world beyond the one they live in. People often consider the universe to be infinitely expanding and growing mysteriously, sometimes leaving people hopeless that they would never be able to understand the universe. In reality and according to the poet, the universe indeed is expanding but is also leaving clues for the children of the universe to work on the clues and discover them. A universe isn't limited to science and planets, gadgets and material attraction, but it is the emotions and essentially a loved one's thoughts that are the major components of what a universe means to humans. As people get used to others being around them, they feel their emotions and their need in their lives. They realize that living in the world and discovering the secrets of the universe can only be achieved if they are together and depend upon each other.

The theme of the poem expands on the need for people to follow rules, be disciplined and lead their lives happily. It also suggests that people must be satisfied with what they have and not demand more than they require.

The extract reminds the readers of the poem to hope for good and keep working towards the good. It instills hope for those who have lost or are on the verge of losing. The extract motivates its readers to continue on the path of wellbeing they must follow and extend their joy of living with others. By following the virtues of life, they are able to make others as well as themselves realise the importance of being together and the need for support every time.

3. Why does the poet claim the world to be beautiful although it has sham, drudgery and broken dreams?

**"With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams,
it is still a beautiful world.**

Be cheerful.

Strive to be happy."

You may use the points below for reference.

- **how happiness impacts people and the world**
- **reality indicating the presence of the positive and negative**
- **happiness created by the company and care**
- **elders teach morals which guide children and creates a happy world**

Answer: Desiderata is an inspirational poem that lets people realize their need to remain cheerful in the world which would otherwise remain in despair because of the sham, drudgery and broken dreams which would have shadowed the lives of people. The poem intends to let people realize the need for them to be companions and support each other, so that they can remain content and encourage their companions thus, living in a world of joy although there is sadness around.

Everything has its two faces- the dark and the bright. Living in a world- the world of competition also has its two sides. The dark side, as one sees to better the other and neglect relationships, which may result in broken dreams. However, the competitive world also teaches people that they need a group to support each other and win together. It teaches people to live together and remain happy, just the way they should.

The poet claims the world to be happy because there are people who strictly follow their morals and care for the others around them. There are times when the hard-hearted are transformed by the presence of caring. Their elders, especially parents who teach them to be better individuals and care for the people around them, teach people morals.

Happiness broadens the focus and expands thinking. It enhances the ability to solve

problems. Counteracting negativity it protects health. Therefore it is important to be happy to live life smoothly.