



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH (2024-25)
CLASS – X
QUESTION BANK – THE BALL POEM

SUMMARY

This poem is written in Blank Verse. In this poem, John Berryman describes how a young boy learns to cope with loss. The loss of the ball symbolises the loss of the boy's innocence. Through the poem, Berryman seems to be saying that the only way to survive losses is to accept them as a permanent truth of life.

Broadly, *The Ball Poem* can be divided into:

- *The Boy Loses the Ball*
- *The Boy Grieves over the Ball*
- *The Boy Overcomes the Loss*

The Boy Loses the Ball

- The poet wonders what the boy is going to do now.
- He watched the boy's ball bounce across the street and fall into the harbour.

The Boy Grieves over the Ball

- The poet believes that it is futile to console the boy as he is overcome with grief.
- The boy just stands and stares at the harbour; he reminisces about happier times when he still had the ball.
- The poet decides not to disturb the boy or to offer him money to buy another ball.

The Boy Overcomes the Loss

- The poet wants the boy to realise that he is responsible for his possessions and how easy it is to lose something.
- The boy also needs to realise that money and possessions aren't the most important things in life.
- The boy learns what it means to overcome loss and survive while he grieves the lost ball.
- He is just like any other person now who has understood the nature of loss through experience.

THEMES

The major themes of this poem are:

- The Loss of Innocence
- Growing up / Transformation

The Loss of Innocence

- This poem explores the child's first experience with loss. The loss of the ball fills him with grief and jolts him out of his carefree mind-set.

- He realises some harsh truths of life. Things or people once lost, do not return.
- In this manner, the experience of losing the ball strips him off his innocence.

Growing up / Transformation

- In the poem, the boy experiences and overcomes loss in a short span of time.
- The poet sees him acknowledge that he is responsible for the things he owns. He also learns to accept loss as a part of life.
- In this manner, he learns how to ‘stand up’, that is, attain the survival skills necessary to withstand future losses. As a result, he grows as a person and transforms from a child to an adult.

MESSAGE OF THE POEM

The message of the poem is that though excruciatingly hurtful, we have to learn how to accept the loss of one’s loved ones and our worldly possessions. It is the nature of life that things are found and lost. We have to take loss in our stride and be brave enough to understand and also accept the inevitability of loss.

We learn that –

1. Loss of someone or something is inevitable in life.
2. A person needs to bravely accept the natural truth of the loss of his beloved possessions whether be materialistic or in person.
3. Life never stops for a person at the loss of a thing. It goes on with the maxim ‘The show must go on’.

A FEW KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS IN THE POEM ARE:

Rhyme scheme

There is no rhyme scheme since the poem has been *written in free verse*.

Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of symbols to signify the ideas by giving them symbolic meaning that are different from their literal meaning.

- The term ‘ball’ is used as a symbol for the boy’s past childhood days that are now gone.
- The loss of the ball is symbolic of the loss of the boy’s innocence.
- It is also symbolic of the boy gaining knowledge on how to experience loss and survive.
- It is also symbolic of the boy becoming a man (gaining mature thinking) after losing innocence of a childhood.

Metaphor

This poetic device is used when a covert comparison is made between two different things or ideas. In this poem, the poet uses the device of metaphor in the 8th line when he compares the boy's young days or his childhood with the lost ball.

- The line 'All his young days into the harbour where His ball went' is an example of metaphor.
- The poet uses this metaphor to draw a comparison between the lost ball and the loss of the boy's childhood.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of the same sound that is used in the beginning of the closely placed words.

- In the poem, the phrases 'what, what' and 'buys a ball back' are examples of alliteration.
- The poet stresses on the repetition of certain sounds in words to enhance the flow of the poem.

Repetition

- Berryman repeats the word '*ball*' at various points of the poem.
- He uses the word on surface to describe the loss of the ball. He also uses it as a symbol for the loss of childhood innocence.
- The phrase 'how to stand up' is repeated to explain the importance of overcoming grief in the poem.
- '*What*' is repeated.

Enjambment

Enjambment describes a clause or a sentence that continues from one line to the next without a pause and without punctuation. By using enjambment, the poet can compose a sentence that runs on for several lines or even straddles the entire poem before reaching a full stop.

- The 2nd and the 3rd line of the first stanza
- 1st to 3rd line of the second stanza
- almost the entire third and fourth stanza

Apostrophe

This poetic device is used when the poet addresses his poem to an absent audience. In this poem, the poet uses the device of an apostrophe in the 13th line as he directly speaks to the little boy and tells him that balls are always liable to get lost, but we never see the boy responding to him.

- The poet uses the literary device of 'apostrophe' to address the little boy.

- Although he is talking to the boy, the boy is away from him, and does not respond to him.

Transferred Epithet

This poetic device is used when an emotion is attributed to a non-living thing after being displaced from a person.

In this poem, the poet uses the device of transferred epithet in the 15th line, when he writes the phrase '*desperate eyes*.' It is not that the eyes of the boy are sad, but that the boy itself is sad and that his eyes are expressing that emotion on his face.

- The poet uses this figure of speech to convey how the emotions on the little boy's face are reflected in his eyes.

Anaphora

Use of two words in two or more lines (*what is the boy what, what*)

Imagery

When poet says, '*merrily bouncing down the street*.'

Assonance

Use of vowel sound 'e' (*He is learning, well behind his desperate eyes*.)

STANZA WISE EXPLANATION OF THE POEM

Stanza One

*What is the boy now, who has lost his ball,
What, what is he to do? I saw it go
Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then
Merrily over — there it is in the water!
No use to say 'O there are other balls':*

The poet begins the poem by telling about a young boy. For the first time in his young life, he has learnt a big lesson, which is to bear the grief of a loss of a loved possession, his ball. The boy loses his ball and sees it bouncing down the street into the water.

The ball symbolises the childhood memories. It is a valued possession of the boy and now it is gone. The ball must have been with the boy for a long time and that's why he is sad over its loss.

The poet realises that it is of no use to console the boy with other balls since the boy wants the same ball only because of his attachment to it.

Stanza Two

*An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy
As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down
All his young days into the harbour where
His ball went. I would not intrude on him;
A dime, another ball, is worthless.*

When the ball bounces down the street into the water, the boy stands fixed with grief. He remains standing stiff and trembling, staring at the water.

When the ball goes into the water all his childhood memories come back to him and he realises that the moments that are gone would never come back, just like the ball. The poet refrains himself from offering some money to buy another ball because it would be worthless.

Stanza Three

*Now He senses first responsibility
In a world of possessions. People will take
Balls, balls will be lost always, little boy.
And no one buys a ball back. Money is external.*

The poet says that in that instant the boy realises his first sense of responsibility. He says that from the loss of ball the boy has learnt how it feels to lose one's loved possession. The loss is immaterial and money can't buy memories and moments. Money cannot replace the things that really matter to us.

Stanza Four

*He is learning, well behind his desperate eyes,
The epistemology of loss, how to stand up
Knowing what every man must one day know
And most know many days, how to stand up.*

The poet says that the boy is learning from the loss of his ball, how to bear the grief of loss of possessions. He is learning how it feels to lose something. Everybody has to stand up after such losses and the boy will also learn to stand up and leave his grief of loss behind and understand the true meaning of loss.

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow

1. "I would not intrude on him;
A dime, another ball, is worthless. Now
He senses first responsibility
In a world of possessions. People will take
Balls, balls will be lost always, little boy.

I. The line, 'He senses first responsibility;' implies that the boy

A. Is learning how to deal with a loss in life.

B. Should yearn for worldly possessions.

C. Senses that this world is inhuman.

D. gives up and wants a new ball.

II. The word 'intrude' DOES NOT have a meaning similar to

A. Disturb

B. Interfere

C. Encroach

D. Advice

III. "World of possessions" means

A. world of deception

B. world of materialism

C. world of reality

D. world of fantasy

IV. Why does the poet say, "I would not intrude on him"?

A. The poet does not like the boy as he has been careless in handling the ball

B. The boy may not talk to strangers, so his attempt to console him will be unsuccessful

C. The boy can get a chance to learn to accept the loss and realise his responsibility of safeguarding his valuable things.

D. The boy may ask him to help him to take the ball out of the water body

2. "..... Now

He senses first responsibility

In a world of possessions. People will take

Balls, balls will be lost always, little boy.

And no one buys a ball back. Money is external."

I. What does the boy understand?

A. How to play

B. To grow up and understands his first responsibility

C. That the people never help in need

D. His ball is worthless

II. What does the word "balls" signify?

A. The boys' innocence and happy young days.

B. The rounded objects

C. The earth is round

D. Instability

III. Who senses the responsibility?

A. The poet's son

B. The boy who plays with a ball

C. The boy whose ball has been lost

D. None of the above

IV. What does "In a world of possessions" mean?

A. Everybody loves to possess things or materials in their names

B. Everybody likes to scold children

C. Everybody has balls

D. Everybody lives in this world

V. Why does the poet say, “Money is external”?

A. It is a visible object

B. It can help you to buy anything in your life

C. It cannot make a man purchase sweet memories and peace of mind

D. It is the most important thing in a man’s life

3. “An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy
As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down
All his young days into the harbour where
His ball went. I would not intrude on him;”

I. Why does the boy stand rigid?

A. He is not well as he suffers from some diseases

B. He is about to jump into the waterbody to pick up the ball

C. He is shocked and grief stricken due to the loss of the ball

D. The boy shows his uncontrollable anger by standing rigidly

II. The boy is very young in this poem. As a mature, balanced grown-up, he might look back and think that his reaction of ‘ultimate shaking grief’ was

a. indifference to the loss

b. according to his level of exposure and experiences when he was young

c. pretension to procure a new toy

d. an immature reaction to the failure of retrieving the ball

A. option a. & b.

B. option a. & c.

C. option c. & d.

D. option b. & d.

III. Which of the persons referred to below can be taken as an ‘intruder’?

A. You invite a person to have evening tea and he comes to your home and spends sometime with your whole family.

B. An acquaintance of yours comes to you as you have requested him to help you in solving a personal issue.

C. A person comes to your home and interferes in your personal matters without your knowledge and permission.

D. While you are studying, you are called by a person to inform you that your brother has been hospitalised and your presence is needed there.

IV. Why does the poet decide not to console the boy?

A. He does not want to get involved with the affairs of a strange boy

B. He thinks that the boy will not accept his suggestions

C. It will be of no use as the boy has to cope with his loss alone

D. He is also perturbed

V. Which poetic device is used in the last line?

A. Personification

B. Simile

C. Onomatopoeia

D. Refrain

4. What is the boy now, who has lost his ball,
What, what is he to do? I saw it go
Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then
Merrily over-there it is in the water!
No use to say 'O there are other balls':

I. **The boy sees the ball going down into the water body. Choose the option that expresses his immediate thought while he watches the sinking ball.**

i.	ii.	iii.	iv.
I don't want that old ball anymore. Now, I can buy a new ball. Let me make sure that it sinks down completely.	I loved my old ball but let it go now. Everything has an end. Its time is over. I should accept the reality. I am not worried at all.	I have lost my ball. It should not have happened. I want to get it back as it's my childhood pal. Oh! It's hard to live without my dear ball that is associated with my sweet memories.	My parents will scold me for the loss of this ball. How could it go from my hands? A worthless ball !

A. option i. only

B. options i. & iii.

C. option iii. Only

D. option ii. & iv.

Ans- i. C. option iii) only

II. His ball went

A dime, another ball, is worthless.

Balls, balls will be lost always. In these lines the ball is personified. You can see some extracts from different poems. Choose the extract in which the same poetic device is used.

I. Sing to me, Autumn, with the rustle of your leaves.

II. "the stars winked at me."

III. "I can swing on this play gym just like a monkey."

IV. "Peter Piper picked a peak of pickled peppers."

A. Option I. & III.

B. Option I. & II.

C. Option II. & III.

D. Option III. & I.V

III. Pick the option that showcases an example of alliteration from the extract.

A. What is the boy now

B. Who has lost his ball

C. I saw it go

D. And then/ Merrily over

IV. Why doesn't the poet console the boy by saying, "O there are other balls?"

A. The lost ball and the memories connected with it cannot be replaced by any other ball

B. The boy was very happy at the loss of the ball

C. Then the boy may demand him to buy a new ball

D. He was not interested to converse with the boy

V. What happened to the boy?

A. He was injured

B. He lost his way back home

C. He lost his ball

D. His ball was snatched away from him

5. He is learning, well behind his desperate eyes,
The epistemology of loss, how to stand up
Knowing what every man must one day know
And most know many days, how to stand up.

I. What is the boy learning?

A. The boy is learning what is right for his age.

B. The boy is learning to cope up with the loss.

C. The boy is learning how to stand up.

D. The boy is learning what every man knows.

II. Why are boy's eyes desperate?

A. The boy's eyes looks desperate as he is learning something hard.

B. The boy's eyes looks desperate as he can't see what he wants.

C. The boy's eyes looks desperate as he is sad to see his ball gone forever.

D. The boy's eyes looks desperate as he is learning to stand up in life.

III. What do you mean by 'epistemology of loss'?

- A. 'Epistemology of loss' means to understand a little about loss.
- B. 'Epistemology of loss' means to understand the loss in general.
- C. 'Epistemology of loss' means to understand the nature of loss.**
- D. 'Epistemology of loss' means to understand something about loss.

IV. What every man needs to know one day?

- A. Every man needs to know not any loss would occur to him.
- B. Every man needs to know all loss would occur only to him.
- C. Every man needs to know no loss would occur to him so as to bear it up.
- D. Every man needs to know one day that loss may occur to him and he would have to bear it up.**

V. What does the poet mean by 'how to stand up'?

- A. How to stand straight
- B. How to bear physical strain
- C. realities How to be brave in facing**
- D. How to avoid realities in life

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Express your views on the title of the poem, 'The Ball Poem'.

When one reads the title 'The Ball Poem', one assumes that the poem may be a light-hearted one but perhaps about the joys of childhood. We must not feel disheartened, dejected and desperate but try to stand up and bear the loss through self-understanding.

2. What is the theme of the poem — 'The Ball Poem'?

In this world sometimes, we lose things which we love and are attached to. We must not feel disheartened, dejected and desperate but try to stand up and bear the loss through self-understanding as the boy who lost the ball he loved was trying to learn.

OR

What is the central idea of the poem 'The ball poem'?

The main idea of the poem is 'the sense of loss in life'. The loss is a fact of life. The sooner man learns to tolerate it the better it is. When we lose something for the first time, we feel very sad. But later we learn to live with our loss. Gain and loss, getting and losing are the essentials in the cycle of life. One should learn the epistemology or the knowledge and nature of the loss. Our childhood with all its attachments and sweet memories has gone forever never to come back again. We should not weep over the losses that we have suffered. The poem also teaches the importance of being emotionally balanced.

3. A ball is an easily available, inexpensive thing. Then, why is the boy so sad to lose it?

No doubt the ball is an easily available and inexpensive item but the ball, the boy has lost is valuable for him. His memories of younger days are associated with it because he had been playing with it for a long time. It was not an ordinary but a special ball for him. No other ball could take its place. So, he is sad to lose it.

4. What shows that the ball was valuable for the boy?

The ball was valuable for the boy is obvious (clear) from the way he reacts after losing it. He was shocked, remained fixed, trembled with grief staring at the place where the ball had fallen. All this shows that he loved the ball and it was valuable for him.

5. 'He senses first responsibility'—what responsibility is referred to here?

The responsibility referred to here is how to stand up or bear the loss through self-understanding and trying to console oneself on his own as the boy who lost his ball was trying to do.

6. Why did the poet not console the boy?

The poet did not console the boy for two reasons—One, the boy was too shocked and grief-stricken to listen to any sense. Second, the poet also observed that the boy was trying to stand up or bear the loss on his own through self-understanding which is much more reflective and lasting. The poet's or anybody else's consoling would not be that effective.

7. Do you think the boy has lost anything earlier? Pick out the words that suggest the answer.

I don't think the boy has lost anything earlier. The first loss is shocking and full of grief—the line—an ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy' reflects it. Also, in the 'senses first responsibility'—the word first shows that it was his first loss.

8. What does the poet notice at the beginning of the poem?

The poet sees a boy playing near a harbour with a ball. The poet saw his ball bouncing. It bounced and fell into the water of the harbour. The boy lost his ball. He became very sad.

9. What was the effect of the loss of ball on the boy?

The poet sees the boy whose ball has fallen into the harbour. He describes the effect of the loss on the boy. The boy is shaken with grief. He trembles and stares down the harbour. His past days come alive in his mind.

10. Why does the poet decide not to give money to the boy or he buy another ball for him?

The poet says that he will not intrude upon the boy because he must learn to tolerate loss. The poet emphasises this loss. He thinks that money cannot compensate for the sense of loss. So, he doesn't give the boy money or buy another ball for him.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Should the boy be allowed to grieve for his ball? If his loss is irreparable or irretrievable then how should one handle it? What lessons can be learnt?

Yes, the boy should be allowed to grieve for his ball, as he had that ball for a long time. He had many old memories associated with it since his childhood. Moreover, when a person is trying to overcome his grief on his own, then one should not intrude or disturb him as it may break his chain of thoughts and may irritate him. One should have self-consolation, and self-understanding in order to bear the loss. Self-realization and understanding are more effective and lasting than when it is done by an external agency or a person.

2. How did the boy really react to the loss of the ball or was he fearful of something or someone? Can our attention be directed toward his family and other people? Are there any lessons to be learnt?

(i) The boy was not fearful of anyone, in fact, he was really upset about the loss of the ball. The ball was valuable for him. He was shocked, remained fixed, trembled with grief staring at the place where the ball had fallen. His family must not have been affected by the loss as a ball is an easily available and inexpensive item.

(ii) The loss of the ball teaches a lesson to us. Money is external in the sense that it can give you only outer happiness or pleasure not inner. Money cannot buy the emotions and heavenly virtues. It cannot be linked with old memories. Moreover, self-consolation, realization or understanding is more effective and lasting than done by an external agency or a person.

3. Why does the poet say, ‘I would not intrude on him?’ Why doesn’t he offer him money to buy another ball?

When a person is trying to come over his grief on his own, he is busy making himself understand certain things if then, someone intrudes or disturbs, and his chain of thoughts is broken. It makes him irritated. Moreover, self-consolation, realization or understanding is more effective and lasting than when it is done by an external agency or a person. The poet knows it. So, he does not intrude on him. His offer of money to buy another ball is useless for the boy wants the same ball he is attached to and has been playing for a long time. No other ball will be able to take its place.

4. How is the lost ball, the metaphor of the lost childhood of the boy? Why doesn’t the poet want to ‘intrude on’ the boy by offering him money to buy another ball?

The boy has a ball. Perhaps he has been keeping it for a long time. He must have developed a lot of attachment and love with the ball. Suddenly while he is playing, the ball bounces down the street. And after a few bounces, it falls down into the harbour. It is lost forever. The boy stands there shocked and fixed to the ground. He constantly goes on staring at the spot where his ball fell down into the water. Outwardly, the loss seems to be quite small. The boy seems to be making a fuss over the loss. Many boys have lost such balls and will lose so in future. A new ball can be easily bought in a dime. The metaphor of the lost ball is beautifully linked to the loss of sweet childhood. No amount of money can buy the ball back that has been lost forever. Similarly, no worldly wealth can buy back the lost childhood. The poet doesn’t want to sermonise on this issue. The boy himself has to learn epistemology or the nature of the loss. He has to move ahead in life forgetting all the losses he has suffered in the past.

5. What is the epistemology of loss in this world of possessions? How has the child learned to stand up in life?

Gain and loss are the two sides of the same coin. Getting, spending and losing things form a natural cycle of life. The boy is inconsolable at the loss of his ball. Actually, it is not the ordinary ball but his long association and attachment with it that makes the loss so unbearable. It is like the good sweet days of childhood that the boy cherishes so much but are lost and gone forever. They will never come back again. So, what is the remedy? He can bear this loss by understanding the epistemology or nature of the loss. In this world of material wealth and possessions, it seems that money can buy anything. However, it is a false conception. Money has its own limitations. Its nature is external. It cannot compensate for the losses that a person suffers emotionally or internally. No wealth can buy back the ball that has been lost forever. Similarly, no wealth can buy back the lost childhood. The child will have to move ahead and stand up in life. He has to stop weeping over his past losses and start living life as it should be lived.

ASSERTION BASED QUESTIONS

1. Rearrange the sentences in the correct sequence and choose the correct option.

- (a) He senses first responsibility in a world of possessions.
- (b) How to stand up knowing what every man must one day know and most know many days, how to stand up.
- (c) A dime, another ball, is worthless.
- (d) Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then Merrily over - there it is in the water!

A (b)-(c)-(a)-(d)

B (d)-(c)-(a)-(b)

C (a)-(d)-(b)-(c)

D (c)-(a)-(b)-(d)

Correct Option: - B

2. Assertion: The poet didn't want to intrude the boy.

Reason: He wanted the boy to experience loss.

A Both assertion and reason are correct and reason is the correct explanation of assertion.

B Both assertion and reason are correct but reason is not the correct explanation of assertion.

C Assertion is true and reason is false.

D Assertion is false and reason is true.

Correct Option: - A

3. Assertion: The poet offered the boy money to buy another ball.

Reason: He wanted the boy to learn that losing is a part of life.

A Both assertion and reason are correct and reason is the correct explanation of assertion.

B Both assertion and reason are correct but reason is not the correct explanation of assertion.

C Assertion is true and reason is false.

D Assertion is false and reason is true.

Correct Option: - D

4. Assertion: The world of possessions is the world of materialistic things.
Reason: The boy senses his responsibility.

- A** Both assertion and reason are correct and reason is the correct explanation of assertion.
- B** Both assertion and reason are correct but reason is not the correct explanation of assertion.
- C** Assertion is true and reason is false.
- D** Assertion is false and reason is true.

Correct Option: - B

5. Assertion: The boy stands rigid and trembling.
Reason: He had lost his ball.

- A** Both assertion and reason are correct and reason is the correct explanation of assertion.
- B** Both assertion and reason are correct but reason is not the correct explanation of assertion.
- C** Assertion is true and reason is false.
- D** Assertion is false and reason is true.

Correct Option: - A

6. Assertion: The boy is learning the knowledge of loss.
Reason: The boy has lost many things earlier also.

- A** Both assertion and reason are correct and reason is the correct explanation of assertion.
- B** Both assertion and reason are correct but reason is not the correct explanation of assertion.
- C** Assertion is true and reason is false.
- D** Assertion is false and reason is true.

Correct Option: - C