



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR

Class: XII	Department: ENGLISH	2024 – 2025
Question Bank	Topic: AUNT JENNIFER'S TIGERS - ADRIENNE RICH	Note:



prance: move with high springy steps	topaz: golden coloured	denizens: dwellers
world of green: green forest	sleek: elegant/glossy	chivalric: brave, kind, polite, respectful towards women
wedding band: wedding ring	ordeals: painful/unpleasant experience	prancing: springing/dancing/moving about



Mood

Aunt Jennifer is anxious, fearful, sad and nervous. She is in a state of turmoil because of her husband's dominating/terrifying nature.

The poem addresses the constraints of married life a woman experiences. Aunt Jennifer represents women all across the world, who are caught under the oppressive hand of patriarchal society. She is torn between the impulse to freedom and imagination (her tapestry of prancing tigers) and the massive weight of gender roles and expectations (symbolised by Uncle's wedding band).



Theme

"Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" reflects the gender struggle that women across the world are subject to. The poet criticizes the male-dominated world.

The poem revolves around desires, and the depressingly harsh realities of Aunt Jennifer's existence using sharp contrasts between the tigers that she sews, and her own self. The tigers that she embroiders appear to be everything that she's not. The tigers' actions are smooth, uninhibited and robust. Aunt Jennifer, on the other hand, has great trouble even embroidering because her movements are so weak and bumbling. Aunt Jennifer is evidently a lonely, pained old woman plagued with anxiety. The reason for her miserable plight is the oppressive patriarchal family system wherein 'Uncle' dominates the scene. She creates an alternative world of freedom — a world that she pines for.



Title

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers are Aunt Jennifer's as they are her creation. She has embroidered them on a screen. They are representative of her hidden aspirations and desires.

Aunt Jennifer is oppressed by the constraints of her married life and her husband's dominating nature. She feels herself as a slave. She embroiders tigers on the panel because tigers symbolize strength, confidence, fearlessness, freedom and power which she aspires for. She creates animals so different from her own character to show the bitterness in her married life, to give vent to her suppressed feelings, and to show strong resistance to male-dominated society. She wants to get out of the bondage imposed by the uncle, if not in reality, then at least symbolically. She has given an expression of her hidden, unfulfilled desires through her tapestry of prancing tigers. This shows that Aunt Jennifer is weak, submissive, meek and is scared of expressing her feelings freely. She expresses herself through art and creativity.



Poetic Devices/Figures of Speech

Alliteration	"fingers fluttering" "chivalric certainty" "prancing, proud"
Imagery	"Bright topaz denizens"
Metaphor/Personification	"Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by"
Hyperbole	"The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band"
Transferred Epithet	"terrified hands"
Symbolism	The symbols used in the poem and their interpretation – • Wedding band: Symbol of oppression in an unhappy marriage/ 'Ringed' means encircled or trapped, losing individuality and freedom. • Aunt Jennifer: A typical victim of male oppression in an unhappy marriage, who suffers loss of individuality, dignity and personal freedom silently. She becomes dependent, fearful and frail. • Tigers: Tigers symbolize untamed free spirit. Here, they are antithesis of their creator's personality. They pace and prance freely, proudly, fearless, confident and majestic in their bearing. The use of colours implies that Aunt Jennifer's tigers and their land are more vital and enjoy a sense of freedom far greater than her. Yellow (bright topaz) connotes the sun and fierce energy, while 'green' reminds one of spring and vitality. • Embroidery: It is a symbol of creative expression. The artwork expresses the Aunt's suppressed desires and becomes her escape from the oppressive reality of her life. • Aunt (last stanza): As opposed to Aunt Jennifer. It shows that she has lost her identity completely, thus lost even her name.



Synopsis

Detailed Summary

Tigers are brave, dignified, chivalric, confident, strong, courageous and fearless. They are brightly coloured dwellers of green forests. They are sure of the power and strength they possess. They pace and prance freely and proudly in an elegant manner. They are not scared of men, something that Aunt Jennifer cannot do in her miserable reality because of her oppressor's looming presence. The chivalrous tigers represent everything Aunt Jennifer desires to be. *Thus, the poem opens with Aunt Jennifer's dream world. The tigers of Aunt Jennifer's embroidery are representative of her free spirit, how she pines for freedom from her burdensome husband. She is expressing her pain through art, creating a picture of how she would like her own life to be.*

The second stanza is the reality of Aunt Jennifer's life. She embroiders tigers on a screen. Her fingers are fluttering to create the beautiful image of the tigers as she is nervous and anxious. She finds it difficult to express her feelings freely as she is oppressed by the massive weight of marriage, gender roles, and a male-dominated society. Uncle's wedding band is symbolic of an oppressive marriage. She is finding the needle so hard to pull because she is afraid of her husband's dominating/terrifying nature. She is under a state of mental suppression because of unhappy married life. She lost confidence in herself. *Her difficulty with the needlepoint represents her inability to express herself in a male dominated society.*

Aunt Jennifer will remain caught in the ordeals of her marriage till her death. She has no escape even after death in this male-dominated society. She will not be free from her bondage. Her suffering will go along with her to her grave. She would die as an oppressed and subdued woman. But the tigers in the panel which she made will go on prancing, proud and unafraid. The fearless tigers she created, an embodiment of everything she aspired to be—proud, fearless and free, will live on to immortality. *It implies that her struggle for freedom for women will continue through the prancing tigers in the panel.*

Q.1 How do Aunt Jennifer's tigers symbolically represent the conflict between her aspirations and the realities of her life?

OR

Why does Aunt Jennifer create animals which were different from her own character? (NCERT)

Ans. Aunt Jennifer was oppressed by the constraints of her married life and her husband's dominating/terrifying nature. She feels herself as a slave. She chose the figure of the tigers for her panel because tigers symbolise strength, confidence, fearlessness, freedom and power which she aspired for. She created animals so different from her own character to show the bitterness in her married life, to give vent to her suppressed feelings, and to show strong resistance to male-dominated society.

Q.2 How does the poet advocate gender sensitisation in the poem "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers"?

Ans. The poem "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" reflects the gender struggle. Adrienne Rich criticizes the male-dominated world for terrifying and oppressing women as symbolized by Aunt Jennifer, leaving her with no alternative but to create an alternate world of freedom and imagination for herself with her tapestry of prancing tigers. The poem is almost a tragedy relating the plight of women trapped in an unhappy marriage. Adrienne Rich yearns for freedom and equality for all women.

Q.3 Who do you think is the speaker of the poem "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers"? Why do you say so?

Ans. The speaker of the poem is Aunt Jennifer's niece rather than her nephew. The niece voices a woman's struggle with expression, rebellion, and a society where power is defined as masculine. The poem deals with a woman's representation of Aunt Jennifer's dreams, reality and the future.

Q.4 How do "denizens" and "chivalric" add to our understanding of the tiger's attitudes? (NCERT)

Ans. 'Denizens' means – tigers of a world of green/forests and 'Chivalric' means brave, kind, polite and respectful towards women. The tigers are free to 'prance' or run around in the green forests, and in their creator's imagination. The "bright topaz denizens of green" evoke a mental image of majestic tigers not bound by the whims of another being. They can help the woman in trouble.

Q.5 Why do we think Aunt Jennifer's hands are 'fluttering' through her wool in the second stanza? Why is she finding the needle so hard to pull? (NCERT)

Ans. Aunt Jennifer embroiders tigers on a screen. Her fingers are fluttering as she is nervous and anxious. She expresses her desires by creating the tigers, but finds it difficult to express her feelings freely as she is oppressed by the weight of marriage, gender roles, and a dominating society.

She is finding the needle so hard to pull because she is afraid of her husband's dominating/terrifying nature. She is under a state of mental suppression because of unhappy married life. She lost confidence in herself. Her difficulty with the needlepoint represents her inability to express herself in a male dominated society.

Q.6 How do symbols in the poem, 'Aunt Jennifer's Tigers' help us understand her plight ?

Ans. *Tigers* created by Aunt Jennifer are symbolic of dynamic, dominant, chivalric, fearless and self-confident, and everything which she aspired for. *Aunt Jennifer* symbolises female suffering/ subservient / dominated – "Fingers fluttering through her wool", "ringed by the ordeals she was mastered by". *Massive weight of uncle's wedding band* is symbolic of male oppression by custom in a patriarchal society.

COMPETENCY BASED QUESTIONS

1. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,

Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.

They do not fear the men beneath the tree;

They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

- i. How do 'denizens' and 'chivalric' add to our understanding of the tiger's attitudes?
 - (a) They are bright and yellow coloured dwellers of forests.
 - (b) The tigers inhabit in a world of green and are conceived as inherently male; they are powerful.
 - (c) The tigers are energetic and free to run around in the forests.
 - (d) Both (b) and (c)
 - ii. Why are the tigers referred to as Aunt Jennifer's?
 - (a) As Aunt Jennifer imagines herself in the form of the tigers.
 - (b) As Aunt Jennifer is embroidering or creating them.
 - (c) As the tigers represent everything she aspired to be in her life.
 - (d) All of these
 - iii. Why do you think Aunt Jennifer created animals that are so different from her own character?
 - (a) The tigers of her creations represented her suppressed desires and her ambitions.
 - (b) The tigers are conceived as inherently male; they are chivalric.
 - (c) The tigers are energetic and free to prance in the world of green.
 - (d) The tigers are not bound by the whims of another being.
 - iv. What is the poetic device used in the line – "They pace in sleek chivalric certainty."?
 - (a) Simile
 - (b) Metaphor
 - (c) Alliteration
 - (d) Personification
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v. The tigers are referred to as 'topaz denizens' because....

vi. The word 'chivalric' possibly means.....

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