



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CLASS - XI
QUESTION BANK – LABURNUM TOP (2023-24)

Introduction- The poem Laburnum Top by Ted Huges revolves around a Laburnum Tree and a Goldfinch bird. The theme of the poem is the symbiotic relationship between the two. It describes the Laburnum Tree during the early autumn.

The laburnum tree looks pretty in the yellow September light. The tree was yellow, silent and dead-like. He describes the yellow leaves and seeds that have loosened from the tree. It was made alive again by the goldfinch bird and her young ones chirping on its branches. The goldfinch entered the tree like a lizard- smooth and rapidly. The poet describes that the Laburnum tree looked extremely pretty in the yellow September light.

The mother Goldfinch keeps flying to find food for her young ones. She feeds her nestlings and moves away to other branches. As soon as she flies back into the sky, there is an elusive silence on the Laburnum tree. Once again, the laburnum tree quiets down as it was before her arrival.

The Laburnum Top Explanation

The poem starts by describing the Laburnum tree. The top of the Laburnum tree is still and silent. It was a motionless afternoon of autumn September light. The poet wants to portray the symbiotic relationship between the Laburnum tree and the Goldfinch. During the days of early autumn, the leaves of the tree have turned yellow and the seeds have fallen on the ground. He describes the whole scenario of the tree in yellow colour. The tree was standing still and there was death-like silence in September.

The tree appears to be still fleetingly until a goldfinch perch on its branch. The life-less tree again gets back to life on the arrival of the Goldfinch. Due to the arrival of the bird, the tree produces a chirruping sound. The poet compares the agility, speed and vigilance to that of a lizard. The Goldfinch arrives swiftly into the tree with a dark striped face.

The yellow and black markings of the bird looked peculiar. While she came towards her younger ones, they started making chattering noises and vibrations which is compared to that of making a sound like a machine. The Goldfinch comes to feed her young ones on the tree. The tree starts to shake because of the movement of the birds and her younger ones. The tree is their shelter.

She hides behind the yellow leaves of the tree. Her dark striped face was visible as the body was yellow in colour. As soon as the mother returns, the tree seems to come back to life. It seems like the entire activity of the bird that keeps the tree alive. She moves to the other side of the branch in a lizard-like movement. After feeding her young ones, she flies back to the sky, the death-like silence and stillness return to the tree.

The Laburnum Top Line by Line Explanation

In The Laburnum Top, the poet says that he saw a Laburnum tree in the daytime of September. The tree looks lifeless and motionless. The treetop was silent and still. It was the autumn season

and all the seeds of the tree had fallen. The poet has used the word 'yellow' to refer to the leaves and sunlight. The yellow colour symbolizes silence, death and beauty. He describes the tree with reference to the yellow colour and uses this colour to describe the whole scene perfectly.

A Goldfinch comes to end the death-like silence of the tree and returns life to it. The top of the tree is calm and quiet in autumnal September sunlight. There is a sudden chirrup of sound, and it breaks the silence. The tree started up like a machine. There was an intrusive noise of twittering in the tree which seemed to shiver. The bird was rapid and alert like a lizard. She rapidly enters the tree and sits on the branches of the tree. She added life to the tree-like engine. She moves towards the thick end of the branch like a lizard. As she did so, her young ones started chirping and vibrating their wings. The engine of her family responds to the calls, and after fueling, she moves out. They were excited and joyous. This resulted in the tree shaking and trembling.

In The Laburnum Top, the poet gives two contradicting scenarios of the tree. The first one is that the tree is mostly in a death-like stillness and silence and the second one is that the tree offers shelter and protection to the young Goldfinches. Both the bird and the tree existed with an association for their survival. The tree serves as a support to the family of the Goldfinch. She brings food for her babies. Only the dark-coloured striped face of the mother Goldfinch is visible as her yellow body camouflages behind the yellow leaves of the Laburnum tree.

The mysterious, low whistle fluttering of the goldfinch brings back tranquility like it was before. The bird starts sliding to the end of the branch after offering food to her young ones. After this, it sweetly chirps and flies away in the blue, infinite sky. This makes the Laburnum tree silent and death-like again.

The Laburnum Top highlights the fact that both the bird and the tree are important for each other's survival. The Laburnum tree and the goldfinches depict the symbol of life and fluctuations. The poet wants to convey the importance of living with each other. The tree's life was seemingly dull and inanimate, but the goldfinch's arrival makes it meaningful and worth living.

It is a kind of mutualism that exists between the two. The poem shows that the laburnum tree is vital to the Goldfinch as it provides shelter to its young ones. The bird and its young ones are important to the tree since they provide the tree with life. The melancholic silence eludes with the arrival of the bird. The entire activity of the goldfinch is responsible for the tree to become spirited.

Conclusion

To sum it up, we learn how the Laburnum tree came back to life upon the arrival of the goldfinch, which describes how sweet and interdependent the relationship they have in between and how they both play such important roles in their lives. The laburnum tree gives shelter to the bird and the chicks and, in turn, takes away its dead silence.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS-

1. How has the yellow colour been used in the poem?

Answer: The yellow colour has been used with great effect in the poem. The Laburnum tree which creates the background has yellow flowers. Some of its leaves have become yellow, as is common in September. The goldfinch bird that comes to this tree has yellow feathers on its wings.

2. How does the poet depict the laburnum tree before the arrival of the goldfinch bird?

Answer: Before the arrival of the goldfinch bird the Laburnum tree is silent. It is an afternoon of autumn and so a few leaves of the tree have become yellow in colour. Moreover, all the seeds of the tree have fallen.

3. When and how does the goldfinch bird come into the Laburnum tree?

Answer: The goldfinch bird comes to the Laburnum tree in one afternoon in September.

At first, the bird sits at the branch end of the tree. It moves its body involuntarily and produces short and high sounds. Thereafter it gets inside the branch smoothly, suddenly and cautiously.

4. What effect does the entrance of the mother goldfinch bird to the inner part of the branch produce?

Answer: Due to the arrival of the mother goldfinch bird to the inner part of the branch the baby goldfinch birds twitter with delight and shake their wings. Later on, they produce sounds of high notes. As a result, the tree shakes and produces a sound of its own.

5. Explain the expression: "It is the engine of her family".

Answer: The mother goldfinch bird is the source of energy to the baby goldfinch birds. These baby birds collectively act as a machine. Like the mechanical engine the mother goldfinch bird is the source of energy to the baby goldfinch birds which here is food.

6. What change do you find in the Laburnum top after the arrival of the mother goldfinch bird?

Answer: After the arrival of the mother goldfinch bird the existence of the baby goldfinch birds in the inner part of the Laburnum top becomes evident. Moreover, because of the sounds produced by the baby birds the tree begins to shake.

7. Which activity does the mother goldfinch bird have in the inner part of the branch of the Laburnum tree?

Answer: In the inner part of the Laburnum tree the mother goldfinch bird feeds the baby goldfinch birds. It is for this purpose that she has come. Then she comes out to the outer part. There her face remains hidden behind the yellow leaves and flowers of the tree.

8. Explain the expression: "barred face identity mask".

Answer: There is an obvious black colour on the face of the goldfinch bird. So, wherever its face remains bared or hidden behind the yellow leaves and flowers of the tree, it becomes difficult to find it out. As a result, its identity remains in mask, meaning hidden.

9. How does the mother goldfinch bird behave after it feeds the baby birds to the full?

Answer: After the mother goldfinch bird feeds the baby birds to the full, it comes out from the inner part of the branch to the outer one. Thereafter, it utters some mysterious sounds which may be words of caution to the baby birds. Finally, it flies away towards the sky.

10. What similarity do you find between the opening and ending of the poem in terms of the condition of the Laburnum tree?

Answer: In the opening part of the poem the Laburnum tree is silent because the baby goldfinch birds do not know of their mother's imminent arrival. At the end of the poem the tree is silent because the baby birds are quiet since their mother has left them.

EXTRACT BASED QUESTIONS

EXTRACT NO: 1

The Laburnum top is silent, quite still

In the afternoon yellow September sunlight,

A few leaves yellowing, all its seeds fallen.

Question: At what time of the day does the poem open?	Answer: The poem opens in the afternoon.
Question: What is the condition of the Laburnum top?	Answer: The Laburnum top is silent.
Question: What does the word 'yellowing' here mean?	Answer: The word 'yellowing' means becoming yellow.
Question: Which season is suggested by the month of September?	Answer: The season suggested by the month of September is autumn.

EXTRACT NO: 2

Till the goldfinch comes, with a twitching chirrup

A suddenness, a startlement, at a branch end.

Then sleek as a lizard, and alert, and abrupt,

She enters the thickness,

Question: What effect is produced at the branch end at the sitting of the mother goldfinch bird on it?	Answer: At the sitting of the mother goldfinch bird at the branch end a suddenness and a startlement are produced.
Question: Why is the mother goldfinch bird 'alert' while entering the thickness?	Answer: The mother goldfinch bird is 'alert' while entering the thickness because she does not want the enemies to know about the existence of the baby goldfinch birds there.
Question: Which figure of speech is used to describe the movement of the mother goldfinch bird?	Answer: The figure of speech used to describe the movement of the mother goldfinch bird is simile.
Question: What does the word 'twitching' mean?	Answer: The word 'twitching' means moving the body.

EXTRACT NO: 3

She enters the thickness, and a machine starts up

Of chitterings, and a tremor of wings, and trillings —

The whole tree trembles and thrills.

Question: How do the baby goldfinch birds react at the arrival of the mother goldfinch bird?	Answer: At the arrival of the mother goldfinch bird the baby goldfinch birds chatter, shake their bodies and even produce sounds of high notes.
Question: What is referred to here as 'thickness'?	Answer: The inner part of the Laburnum top in general and the branch on which the Goldfinch sits in particular is referred to here as 'thickness'.
Question: What does the word 'thrills' mean?	Answer: The word 'thrills' means shakes violently.
Question: Why are the baby goldfinch birds looked upon as a machine?	Answer: The baby goldfinch birds are looked upon as a machine because they seem to have a start and stop mechanism like a machine.

EXTRACT NO: 4

It is the engine of her family.

She stokes it full, then flirts out to a branch-end

Showing her barred face identity mask

Question: What is referred to here as "the engine"?	Answer: The mother goldfinch bird is referred to here as "the engine".
Question: Where does the mother goldfinch bird flirt out?	Answer: The mother goldfinch bird flirts out to the end of a branch.
Question: In which sense is the 'face' of the mother goldfinch bird 'barred'?	Answer: The 'face' of the mother goldfinch bird is 'barred' in the sense that its face is dominantly yellow but has a black spot on it.
Question: What 'mask' the identity of the mother goldfinch bird?	Answer: The yellowing leaves and the yellow flowers 'mask' the 'identity' of the mother goldfinch bird.

EXTRACT NO: 5

Then with eerie delicate whistle-chirrup whisperings

She launches away, towards the infinite

And the laburnum subsides to empty.

Question: Towards which does the mother goldfinch bird launch away?	Answer: The mother goldfinch bird launches away towards the infinite.
Question: What change do you find at the Laburnum top after the departure of the mother goldfinch bird?	Answer: After the departure of the mother goldfinch bird the Laburnum top becomes silent once again.
Question: What does the word 'whistle-chirrup' mean?	Answer: The word 'whistle-chirrup' means the whistle-like sound produced by the mother goldfinch bird.
Question: Why does the poet use the word 'eerie'?	Answer: The poet uses the word 'eerie' because he fails to find out the idea the mother goldfinch bird is trying to convey through it.

Following poetic devices have been used in the poem “The Laburnum Top” written by Ted Hughes –

1. **Alliteration:** - “(S)eptember (s)unlight”, “a (s)uddenness, a (s)tartlement”, “the whole (t)ree (t)rembles”, “(w)histle-chirrup (w)hispering.
2. **Simile:** “then sleek as a lizard”
3. **Metaphor:** “a machine starts up of chittering”, “the engine of her family”, “Her barred face identity mask”.
4. **Personification:** “the whole tree trembles and thrills”.
5. **Transferred epithet:** “Her barred face identity mask”.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS-

1. What Transferred Epithet was used in the poem ‘The Laburnum Top’?

- (a) her barred face identity mask
- (b) engine of her family

- (c) Sleek as a lizard
- (d) September sunlight

(a) her barred face identity mask

2. Where did the bird vanish after feeding her young ones?

- (a) to the other branch
- (b) to the top of the tree
- (c) to her nest
- (d) behind the yellow leaves

(d) behind the yellow leaves

3. Where are the young ones of the Goldfinch bird?

- (a) On the thickness of the branch
- (b) On the top of the tree
- (c) on other tree
- (d) they were never there

(a) On the thickness of the branch

4. When did the death-like tree become alive?

- (a) in the month of March
- (b) by the arrival monsoon season
- (c) by the arrival of the Goldfinch bird
- (d) by the arrival of sparrows

(c) by the arrival of the Goldfinch bird

5. What happened to the leaves of the Laburnum tree?

- (a) they were green
- (b) turned yellow
- (c) fallen down
- (d) new leaves growing

(b) turned yellow

6. What does the phrase “her barred face identity mask” mean?

- (a) because she was brown in colour
- (b) due to her dark coloured yellow body

- (c) bird's face became her identity and symbol of recognition
- (d) because her dark colour became her identity

c. bird's face became her identity and symbol of recognition

7. What instance of Alliteration has been used in the poem 'The Laburnum Top' out of the following options?

- (a) engine of her family
- (b) her barred face
- (c) Sleek as a lizard
- (d) September sunlight

(d) September sunlight

8. What happened to the bird in the end of the poem?

- (a) she flew away
- (b) she stayed at the tree
- (c) she went to other tree
- (d) she went to bring some food for her younger ones

(a) she flew away

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Give a brief account of the sounds and movement of the goldfinch on the laburnum top.

Ans. The goldfinch chirps and suddenly settles on the end of a branch on the top of the laburnum tree. Then quite suddenly and watchfully she enters the middle part of the tree. She moves smoothly like a lizard. Then the tree is filled up with a series of short, quick, high pitched chattering sounds, shaking of wings and quavering sound. The whole tree shakes slightly and is excited. It seems as if a whole machine has started working. This thickness of the tree houses the family of goldfinch and she stokes the engine of her family before leaving the tree and flying off to the infinite. The laburnum top regains its silence and stillness.

2. What values do you learn from goldfinch in the poem?

Ans. In the poem "The Laburnum Top," a goldfinch has a nest on top of a laburnum tree. While the mother goldfinch continues to leave the nest at regular intervals in search of food to feed her babies, her young ones remain inside the nest. This demonstrates her concern for her offspring's and emphasizes the importance of a mother's love and care for her children. The poem also emphasizes the importance of protection and safety through the goldfinch's

quick movements. The poet has compared the motion of the bird to that of a lizard, which moves swiftly. In order to avoid being seen by any predators, Goldfinch is aware of her surroundings and moves quickly.

Q3. How does the poem express the sentiment of co-dependency? How do the laburnum and the goldfinch help each other? Elaborate.

Ans. The bond between a goldfinch and a tree is described in the poem “The Laburnum Top” by Ted Hughes. The entire tree, an integral aspect of its symbiotic relationship with the bird. The laburnum and the goldfinch have important interrelationships because the tree protects the bird and her young ones while the goldfinch gives the tree a life.

The “quiet” and seemingly lifeless laburnum tree is fading in the early autumn at the beginning of the poem:

“In the afternoon yellow September sunlight,
A few leaves yellowing, all its seeds fallen.”

This European plant blends in with the sunshine and is also known as a Golden Chain Tree or Golden Rain Tree for its dangling yellow blossoms. The deciduous tree’s drying (“yellowing”) leaves and cast-off seeds indicate its increasing dormancy.

“She enters the thickness, and a machine starts up
Of chittering, and a tremor of wings, and trilling—
The whole tree trembles and thrills.
It is the engine of her family.
She stokes it full.”