

KEEPING QUIET

About the poet

Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) is the pen name of Neftali Ricardo Reyes Basoalto who was born in the town of Parral in Chile. Neruda's poems are full of easily understood images which make them no less beautiful. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 1971. In this poem Neruda talks about the necessity of quiet introspection and creating a feeling of mutual understanding among human beings.

Before you read

What does the title of the poem suggest to you? What do you think the poem is about?

Now we will count to twelve

and we will all keep still.

For once on the face of the Earth

let's not speak in any language,

let's stop for one second,

and not move our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment

without rush, without engines,

we would all be together

in a sudden strangeness.

Fishermen in the cold sea

would not harm whales

and the man gathering salt

would look at his hurt hands.

Those who prepare green wars,

wars with gas, wars with fire,

victory with no survivors,

would put on clean clothes

and walk about with their

brothers

in the shade, doing nothing.

What I want should not be

confused

with total inactivity.

Life is what it is about;

I want no truck with death.

If we were not so single-minded

about keeping our lives moving,

and for once could do nothing,

perhaps a huge silence

might interrupt this sadness

of never understanding ourselves

and of threatening ourselves with

death.

Perhaps the Earth can teach us

as when everything seems dead

and later proves to be alive.

Now I'll count up to twelve

and you keep quiet and I will go.

to have no truck with : to refuse to associate or deal with, to refuse to

tolerate something

Listen to the poem.

Click on the link below to listen to the poem being read aloud . Note the pronunciations of the words and read along.

[Class 12 | Keeping Quiet | Pablo Neruda | Audiobook](#)

Importance of pausing:



Healthy combination of activity and inactivity:



SUMMARY

In the poem, “**Keeping Quiet**” Pablo Neruda sends out an urgent message .He is very sad about the fact that we are all rushing thoughtlessly all the time. We never stop to think about the pain and destruction we are causing to each other, to other species, and to our planet. He talks about the need to be silent for a while, and understand every living being is interconnected with every other living being. We are all brothers.

He hopes that in silence, we will understand the danger of what we are doing. With that understanding, he hopes that we will change the dangerous way in which we behave, so we can heal ourselves and our planet. He believes that this understanding will lead to peace and harmony.

Neruda emphasizes that this “quiet” is not about death or inactivity forever, but a temporary pause to help us all to become aware and to gain understanding that leads to change .

Key Idea:

Stopping, taking even a short break from our hectic lives can help us understand ourselves and our actions. This awareness will help us live more meaningfully with less death and destruction on our planet .

VOCABULARY

1. **Still**: not moving; completely quiet and calm

The dog stood **still** when the girl started to pet him.

2. **Exotic**: unusual and fascinating

Since it was her first time visiting a new city, she thought the food smelled **exotic**.

3. **Without rush**: slowly and calmly, without any hurry

She completed her chores **without rush**, taking her time since there was nowhere else to be that day.

4. **Strangeness**: the quality of being unusual or unfamiliar

The teacher felt a certain **strangeness** in the quiet classroom.

5. **Gathering**: the act of collecting or picking something from a place

The women spent the morning gathering firewood from the forest.

6. **Inactivity**: a state of doing nothing; lack of movement or action

To avoid **inactivity** during the summer holidays, he started to play cricket with his friends.

7. **Interrupt**: to stop something or someone in the middle of what they are doing

It is considered rude to **interrupt** an elder while they are speaking.

8. **Threatening**: suggesting that something dangerous or harmful is about to happen

The teacher was threatening to cancel the movie if the noise did not stop immediately

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What will counting up to twelve and keeping still help us achieve?
2. Do you think the poet advocates total inactivity and death?
3. What is the 'sadness' that the poet refers to in the poem?
4. What symbol from Nature does the poet invoke to say that there can be life under apparent stillness?

LITERARY DEVICES

- **Alliteration:** Repetition of consonant sounds at the start of words (e.g., "we **will** count", "sudden **strangeness**", "his **hurt** hands", "clean **clothes**").
- **Repetition:** Phrases repeated for emphasis (e.g., "without rush, without engines", "count to twelve").
- **Symbolism:**
 - **Twelve:** Represents the hours on a clock or months in a year, signifying a full cycle of time/introspection.
 - **Green wars:** Refers to environmental destruction.
 - **Wars with gas/fire:** Refers to destruction and pollution.
 - **Clean clothes:** Symbolizes a new, peaceful perspective.
 - **Brothers:** Symbolizes humanity/universal brotherhood.
- **Personification:** Human qualities given to nature (e.g., "Earth can teach us" - implies the Earth is a teacher).
- **Imagery:** Vivid mental pictures created (e.g., "Cold Sea", "hurt hands", "put on clean clothes").
- **Metaphor:** Direct comparison (e.g., "shade" refers to protection).
- **Antithesis:** Juxtaposing opposing ideas (e.g., "count to twelve and we will all keep still").
- **Enjambment:** When a sentence continues across lines without punctuation (e.g., "If we were not so single-minded / about keeping our lives moving").
- **Rhetorical Question:** Questions asked for effect rather than answers (e.g., "Would there be no silence?").
- [S]

Poem Structure: The poem is written in **free verse** with no fixed rhyme scheme, allowing the tone to be calm, meditative, and persuasive.

EXTRA QUESTIONS

- Q1: What is the significance of the title "Keeping Quiet"?
- Q2: Why does the poet mention the "man gathering salt"?
- Q3: What does the poet mean by "victory with no survivors"?

Q.4.Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow: (All India 2009)

Now we will count to twelve
and we will all keep still.
For once on the face of the Earth
let's not speak in any language,
let's stop for one second,
and not move our arms so much.

1. How long does the poet want to stay still?
2. What does he hope to achieve by keeping quiet?
3. What does the poet mean by 'not move our arms so much'?

Q.5.Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow: (Delhi 2013)

Perhaps the Earth can teach us
as when everything seems dead
and later proves to be alive.
Now I'll count upto twelve
and you keep quiet and I will go.

1. What does the Earth teach us?
2. What does the poet mean to achieve by counting upto twelve?
3. What is the significance of 'keeping quiet'?

Q.6. Those who prepare green wars,

wars with gas, wars with fire,

victory with no survivors,

would put on clean clothes

and walk about with their

brothers

in the shade, doing nothing.

Questions

(a)Name the poem and the poet of these lines.

(b)What sort of wars are mentioned in the above lines?

(c)What kind of victory will it be?

(d) How should the lovers of war behave?.

Q.7.What I want should not be confused

with total inactivity. Life is what it is about;

I want no truck with death.

If we were not so single-minded

about keeping our lives moving,

and for once could do nothing,

perhaps a huge silence

might interrupt this sadness of never understanding

ourselves and of threatening ourselves with death.

Questions

(a)What does the poet want? What should it not be confused with?

(b)Explain: 'I want no truck with death'.

(c)What do people pursue single-mindedly? Which is the better course the poet suggests?

(d)When can a huge silence do us good?