

Oral Activity

Imagine that on the occasion of 'Children's Day' your school is organizing a speech competition on the topic 'Education of girls for women's empowerment'.

Draft a speech and deliver it in the class.

The following points may help you in preparing the speech:

- Importance of girls' education
- gender bias and other problems in girls' education
- how to end bias towards girls

Remember the following points while delivering the speech:

- Maintain appropriate posture
- Modulate your voice using stress, pause and intonation
- Use appropriate gestures and facial expressions
- Maintain eye contact with the audience

B Reading

Once upon a Time

Once upon a time, son,
they used to laugh with their hearts
and laugh with their eyes:
but now they only laugh with their teeth,
while their ice-block-cold eyes
search behind my shadow.

There was a time indeed
they used to shake hands with their hearts:
but that's gone, son.

Now they shake hands without hearts:
while their left hands search
my empty pockets.

'Feel at home!' 'Come again':
they say, and when I come
again and feel
at home, once, twice,
there will be no thrice -
for then I find doors shut on me.

So I have learned many things, son.
I have learned to wear many faces
like dresses - home face,
office face, street face, host face,
cocktail face, with all their conforming smiles
like a fixed portrait smile.

And I have learned too
to laugh with only my teeth
and shake hands without my heart.
I have also learned to say, 'Goodbye',
when I mean 'Good-riddance';
to say 'Glad to meet you',
without being glad; and to say 'It's been
nice talking to you', after being bored.

But believe me, son.

I want to be what I used to be

when I was like you. I want

to unlearn all these muting things.

Most of all, I want to relearn

how to laugh, for my laugh in the mirror

shows only my teeth like a snake's bare fangs !

So show me, son,

how to laugh; show me how

I used to laugh and smile

once upon a time when I was like you.

by **Gabriel Okara**



About the author

Gabriel Okara is an African poet. He was born in 1921 in Nigeria. He was educated at Government College, Umuahia. His parents were not rich. He worked as a book binder and later as an information officer at Enugu. He also wrote plays and features for broadcasting and became a poet of outstanding ability. His poems appeared regularly in *Black Orpheus*. He has also written a novel called *Voice*.

Glossary

- cock-tail (*n*) : a drink usually made from a mixture of two or more alcoholic drinks
- conform (*v*) : to be and thinking the same way as most other people in a group or society; normally acceptable
- portrait (*n*) : a painting, drawing or photograph of a person especially of the head and shoulders.
- good - riddance (*n*) : a feeling of relief when an unwanted person leaves

muting (*adj*) : changing all the time; expressionless / not expressed in speech

fangs (*n*) : long, sharp teeth of some animals like snakes and dogs.

Comprehension

I Tick (✓) the option that will complete each of the following statements. In some cases more than one option may be possible.

1. In the first five stanzas the poet is talking about
 - a) the honest and innocent world of children.
 - b) the insincere world of adults.
 - c) the difference between the past and the present.
 - d) the old and the young.
2. The last four lines of the poem suggest
 - a) hope.
 - b) regret.
 - c) a sense of loss.
 - d) eagerness to learn.
3. The expression 'Ice-cold-block eyes' means
 - a) The eyes are wet with tears.
 - b) expressionless eyes.
 - c) a state of lack of feelings.
 - d) a dead man's eyes.
4. 'They' in line 4 of stanza 1 refers to
 - a) people in the past.
 - b) present day people.
 - c) all adults .
 - d) young children.

5. 'Their eyes search behind my shadow' means
- they avoid meeting his eyes.
 - they try to look at the darker side of the person.
 - they convey no emotions.
 - they try to see what is not there.
6. The poet has learnt
- to shake hands.
 - the ways of the world.
 - to laugh.
 - to put on masks.
7. The poet wants to learn from his son because his son
- is not corrupted by the ways of the world.
 - is more informed.
 - knows about good manners more than his father.
 - is more caring.

II Answer the following questions in a sentence or two each.

- When did people shake hands with their hearts?
- What is the poet crying over? What help does he want from his son?
- "Most of all, I want to relearn
how to laugh, for my laugh in the mirror
shows only my teeth like a snake's bare fangs !"
What does the poet mean by these lines?
- What is the tone of the poem?
- "Now they shake hands without hearts:
while their left hands search
my empty pockets."
Why do the left hands search empty pockets now? What does this indicate?
- The poet uses certain words to express frustration and sorrow. Identify these words.