

POEM by Barolong Seboni (1957 –)

We do not need
these jagged words
that dig a trench between us
each time they are uttered

those epithets 5
sharp like spokes
that pierce the heart when spoken

there is no room in my cup
for these acidic words of sarcasm
that corrode my sensitivity 10

these cold and icy words tossed
to deaden the heart
venomous words
from your serpentine tongue
that infect the feeling.... 15

Let us speak, love
in gentler tones
timid as the lamb
is soft
woolly words 20
worn to stand strong against the
cold-bitterness of the world.

Better still
let us search in our speech
for words deep as the soul is still 25
that will spell our thoughts
in the silence of our smiles.

POEM - BAROLONG SEBONI

QUESTIONS:

1. Refer to lines 1 to 2 ("jagged words"):
 - a. Identify an example of a metaphor in these lines.
 - b. Explain how this figure of speech contributes to the message of the poem.
2. Refer to line 3 ("that dig a trench between us"). Discuss the way "these jagged words" are personified.
3. Refer to line 5 (those epithets").
 - a. In your own words explain what an "epithet" is.
 - b. Give an example to illustrate its meaning in the context of the poem.
4. Refer to lines 6 to 7. A spoke is a sharp object, usually made of steel:
 - a. Explain the simile used in these lines.
 - b. In which way may "pierce" be seen as an example of personification? What is the effect created?
5. Stanza 3 refers to "acidic words" that "corrode":
 - a. What figurative device is used in these lines?
 - b. Considering the effect of acid, what is the poet's intention in comparing sarcasm to an erosive substance?
6. Refer to line 11 to 12 ("these cold and icy words tossed to deaden the heart").
 - a. Do you think the word "tossed" is an effective word to use here? Motivate your answer.
 - b. Explain how disagreements might be referred to as either "heated" or "cold and icy".
 - c. How do you prefer to settle a disagreement – with a heated argument or with icy, sarcastic words? Give a reason for your answer.
7. Refer to lines 13 to 15:
 - a. To what is an opponent compared to in these lines? Provide two CONSECUTIVE words in support of your answer.
 - b. Explain the effect of these hurtful words according to line 15.
8. In Stanza 5, the tone of the poem changes. Discuss how the poet brings about a change in tone.
9. Do you agree with the poet's belief in stanza 5 that "gentler tones" can overcome "venomous words"? Give a reason for your answer.
10. Refer to lines 18 to 19:
 - a. Explain the simile used in these lines.
 - b. Indicate in which way biblical references are used to show the contrast between the poet's current method of communication and that which he hopes for.

11. In lines 20 to 22, the poet uses yet another metaphor:
 - a. Which two things are being compared in the metaphor?
 - b. What does “cold-bitterness” in line 22 refer to?
 - c. How does the poet use sound to emphasise the meaning of these words?
12. In the last stanza the poet further emphasises the ideal way in which words should be communicated. What does he advise?
13. Identify the sound device used in the last stanza and explain its effect.