

# KEEPING QUIET

**-Pablo Neruda**  
**(1904-1973)**



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# KEEPING QUIET

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**(1904-1973)**

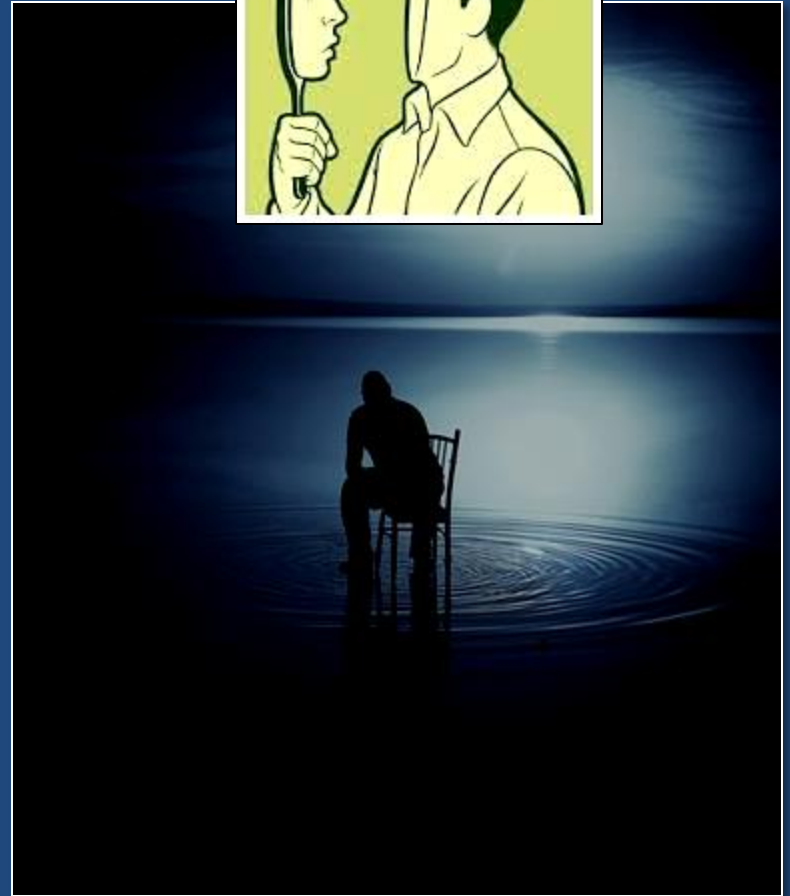
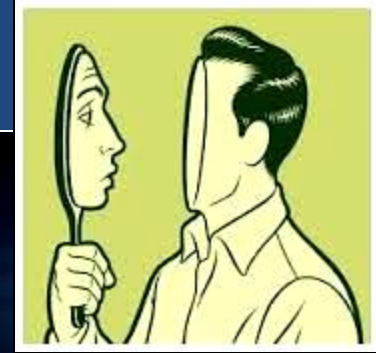
**About the Poet :** Pablo Neruda is the pen name of Neftali Ricardo Reyes Basoalto who was born in the town of Parral in Chile. Neruda's poems are full of easily understood images which make them no less beautiful. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 1971. In this poem Neruda talks about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



# KEEPING QUIET

## Introduction

The poem reveals the consequences of inhuman acts. The poet is deeply concerned about violence, cruelty to animals and plight of manual workers. He offers a very simple solution to many of our social, political and religious problems. He advocates the necessity of quiet introspection as it can develop a feeling of mutual understanding among human beings. If self-introspection is acted upon, it will be the first major step towards uniting people. The poet urges everyone to look within and analyse what is wrong and who is the wrong doer. This will cleanse every heart and ennoble all people.





# Keeping Quiet

Theme – Self-introspection for peace and harmony

Sub-Theme – Universal brotherhood

The speaker/narrator – the poet himself (like a messiah)



# Keeping Quiet

Now we will count to twelve  
and we will all keep still.

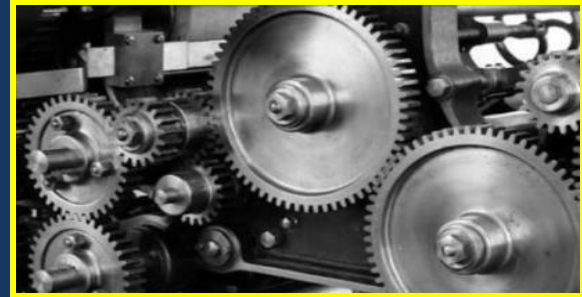
For once on the face of the Earth  
let's not speak in any language,  
let's stop for one second,  
and not move our arms so much.



# Keeping Quiet

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.





# Keeping Quiet

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.

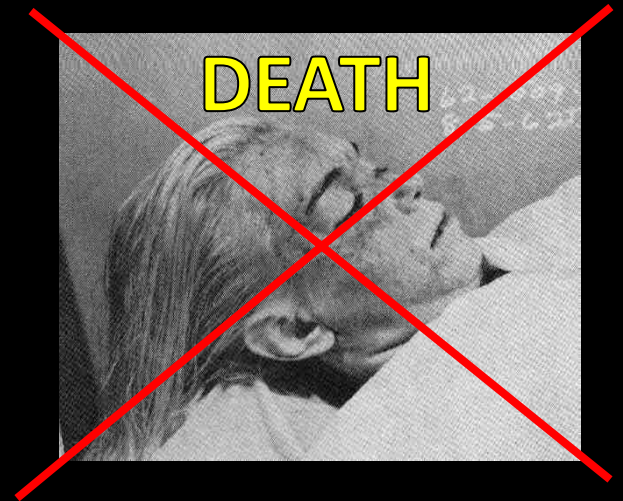


# Keeping Quiet

What I want should not be  
confused  
with total inactivity.  
Life is what it is about;  
I want no truck with death.



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# Keeping Quiet

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.



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# Keeping Quiet

Perhaps the Earth can teach us  
as when everything seems dead  
and later proves to be alive.

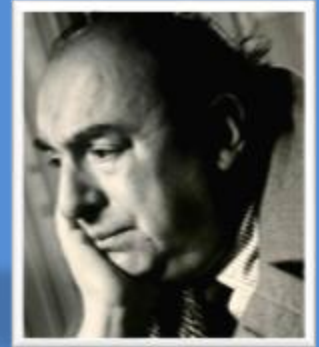
Now I'll count up to twelve  
and you keep quiet and I will go.







# Keeping Quiet



## SUMMARY

The poet talks about the need of silence and quiet introspection and the importance of tranquility and calmness. He also talks about creating a feeling of mutual understanding among human beings. The poet asks us to keep still and count up to twelve. He also asks us to sit still. For a moment we should not speak any language. We should not move our arms so much. It will be a moment of complete silence without rush or worry. This would be an exotic moment. Then a sudden strangeness will prevail which we will all enjoy. It will be a bliss. The fisherman would not harm the whales on the cold sea. Even the man gathering salt would stop working and look at his hurt hands and reflect at the pain and harm his strenuous task has caused him. All kinds of wars must be stopped at once. The green wars against the environment, wars with poisonous gases, firearms, must be stopped at once. People who are all the time preparing for wars leaving no survivors behind ought to find time to wear clean clothes and walk around with their brothers strengthening the message of peace and brotherhood.



# Keeping Quiet

## SUMMARY

At the same time the poet cautions not to confuse stillness with total inactivity. Life is an ongoing process and it should not be associated with death. It is to be lived with positive attitude. He does not want us to ruminate over death. But he feels that if for once we do not focus ourselves single-mindedly to keep our lives moving, but do some introspection or spend some time in silence doing nothing, we can understand ourselves better and escape from the threatening calls of death. The earth can teach us a lesson about how, even after a dead end, everything comes back to life again. In the same manner a quiet introspection can bring all evil thoughts to an end and bring in a new life of peace and tranquility. The poet says that now, he will count up to twelve and we should all keep quiet and he will go. Thus the poem “Keeping Quiet” celebrates the necessity of introspection and the advantage of doing nothing and maintaining silence for some time and in the vast treasure of deep silence all depression will vanish and peace would be attained for one would be with oneself at one’s peaceful best.



## VOCABULARY

on the face – on the surface

exotic – strange, especially in an exciting way

truck – association

single-minded – focusing on only one interest

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.



# Keeping Quiet

## POINTS TO PONDER

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.

# Keeping Quiet



## Poetic Device/Figure of Speech

**Alliteration** - we will, we would, his hurt hands,  
clean clothes

**Repetition** – without rush, without engines ; wars with  
gas,  
wars with fire

**Imagery** – cold sea

**Symbol** – Earth

**Pun** - not move our arms so much (hands/weapon)

## Rhyme Scheme

The poem does not follow any rhyme or rhythm. It is written in **free verse**.



# ASSIGNMENT : QUESTIONS TO TEST COMPREHENSION

## Short Answer Questions (30-40 words)

What I want should not be  
confused  
with total inactivity.  
Life is what it is about;  
I want no truck with death.



**Sample Q. Extract-based**

- i. What is it that should not be confused with 'total inactivity'? ii. What is life all about?  
iii. Explain "no truck with death"? iv. What should be the aim of our life?

1. What does the fisherman not harming whales actually symbolise?
2. How can the idea of wars and the vanquished be negated?
3. How do you know that the poet is not advocating complete inactivity and death?
4. What is the sadness that the poet refers to? What does the poet recommend to overcome it?
5. What will counting up to twelve and keeping still help us achieve?
6. What symbol from nature does the poet invoke to say that there can be life under apparent stillness?
7. "Let's not speak in any language." Explain.
8. Why does the poet say that keeping still for sometime would be an 'exotic moment'?
9. "Victory with no survivors". Explain.
10. Justify the title of the poem.
11. What do you understand by 'Life is what it is about'?