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**OH, I WISH I'D LOOKED AFTER MY TEETH**

► By Pam Ayres

**Summary**

The poet was very stubborn and negligent of dental hygiene during childhood. She was too careless and never listened to the instructions of her mother. She was too tempted by candies, lollies, sherbets and other sticky sweets. Her mother cautioned her time and again that a tooth is like a friend, and it should be looked after well. But the poet could not resist sweets. She tried to brush with up and down strokes, put lot of tooth paste on her teeth, but the damage was already done. Decay had given way to cavities and eventually to drillings and fillings. Now during adulthood, the poet regrets but nothing can change the condition of her teeth. Painful injections and visits to the dentist have become her routine. The poet feels so miserable and guilty over how she used to mock at her mothers ugly and false teeth. Now her condition is no different.

**सारांश**

कवयित्री बचपन में बहुत जिद्दी लड़की थी और उसने अपने दाँतों की बिल्कुल परवाह नहीं की। उसने दाँतों की सुरक्षा के बारे में अपनी माँ की शिक्षा व आदेशों की बिल्कुल परवाह नहीं की और बहुत ही लापरवाह रही। वह हर तरह की मीठी गोливियाँ, लौलीपॉप, शरबत और दाँतों में चिपकने वाली मीठी चीजें खाती रही, उनसे वह बहुत आकर्षित रही। माँ ने बार-बार चेतावनी दी कि दाँत एक मित्र

की तरह हैं और एक मित्र की तरह ही उनका ध्यान रखना चाहिए। पर कवयित्री मिठाई से कभी अपने को बचा नहीं पाई, उनका विरोध नहीं कर पाई। उसने उन्हें ढेर सारा पेस्ट लगाकर खूब ऊपर नीचे करके साफ रखने की बाद में कोशिश की। परन्तु बहुत देर हो चुकी थी और दाँतों को हानि पहुँच चुकी थी। दाँतों में सड़न और खोखलापन हो गया था और उनमें लगातार मशीन से छेद करना और भरना शुरू हो गया था। अब प्रौढ़ अवस्था में पहुँचकर कवयित्री को पश्चाताप हुआ कि अब उनके दाँतों का सुधार नहीं हो सकता और दुखदायी इंजेक्शन लगवाना, दाँतों के डाक्टर के पास जाना उनके जीवन का एक हिस्सा बन गया है। कवयित्री को बहुत दुख और अपराध की भावना का आभास होता है जब वह स्मरण करती हैं कि कैसे वह अपनी माँ के बदसूरत और नकली दाँतों का मजाक उड़ाती थीं। अब उसकी दशा अपनी माँ के समान ही है।

**Word-Meaning**

- **Spotted** – noticed ● **Perils** – bad condition
- **Choppers** – (here) teeth ● **Brittle** – hard but liable to break
- **Flashed** – to move quickly ● **Paving the way** – Creating easy circumstances
- **Decay** – to rot
- **Murder** – (here) very difficult experience ● **Despair** – loss of hope
- **Whine** – to utter a cry of pain
- **Reckoning** – the action of calculating something
- **Beckoning** – summoning

**SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT**

**TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS (SOLVED)**

1. On the basis of your reading of the poem, complete the following table.

Stages in the life of the poet	Activities	Consequences
(a) Youth	eating toffees _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
(b) Adulthood	_____ _____ _____	gazing at the dentist in despair

Ans :	Stages in the life of the poet	Activities	Consequences
	(a) Youth	(i) eating toffees (ii) eating sweet sticky food (iii) eating gobstoppers (iv) licking lollipops (v) eating liquorice (vi) eating sherbet dabs (vii) not brushing up-and-down	(i) Filling of the teeth. (ii) Pricking of conscience (iii) Creating circumstances to have cavities, caps and decay of teeth. (iv) Injections and drillings.
	(b) Adulthood	(i) Lying in old dentist's chair (ii) Looking intently at the nose of the dentist in despair.	(i) gazing at the dentist in despair (ii) drilling of her molar teeth (iii) realisation if she had looked after her teeth properly.

2. On the basis of your understanding of the poem, answer the following questions by ticking the correct choice :

(a) The title 'Oh, I wish I'd looked after me teeth' expresses \_\_\_\_\_.

- (i) regret (ii) humour  
(iii) longing (iv) pleasure

Ans : (iii) regret

(b) The conscience of the speaker pricks her as she has \_\_\_\_\_.

- (i) been careless (ii) been ignorant  
(iii) been fun loving (iv) been rude

Ans : (i) been careless

(c) The speaker says that she has paved the way for cavities and decay by \_\_\_\_\_.

- (i) eating the wrong food and not brushing  
(ii) not listening to her mother  
(iii) laughing at her mother's false teeth  
(iv) not listening to the dentist

Ans : (i) eating the wrong food and not brushing

(d) The tone of the narrator is one of \_\_\_\_\_.

- (i) joy (ii) nostalgia  
(iii) regret (iv) sorrow

Ans : (iii) regret

3. Answer the following questions.

(a) *But up and down brushin'*

*And pokin' and fussin'*

*Didn't seem worth the time – I could bite"*

*What do these lines convey?*

Ans : The poet used upward and downward strokes to brush her teeth. She used lot of toothpaste but all proved in vain. She was not able to bite and eat properly. These lines convey the poet's regret and loss of valuable time, when she could have cared for her teeth.

(b) *Why did the poet go to the dentist? How could she have avoided it?*

Ans : The poet had neglected her teeth. Decay, cavities had already appeared and there was no way the visit to the dentist could have been avoided. If she had not been so careless and stubborn in youth, this could have been avoided.

(c) *"If you got a tooth, you got a friend."* What do you understand from the line?

Ans : Friends stay with us through thick and thin. They help us tide over our problems and share our joys. Similarly, our teeth are our permanent friends and we enjoy life through them.

(d) *With reference to the poem, how can you look after your teeth?*

Ans : We must avoid eating sweet sticky food nor gorge on too many sweets or candies. When we eat them occasionally, we must brush immediately. Moreover, we must also keep our will-power in check and resist them.

(e) *Give an appropriate proverb that conveys the meaning that this poem carries.*

Ans : The most appropriate proverb that comes to my mind after reading this poem is : "Prevention is better than cure." Had the poet followed it, she would not have to go to a dentist.

## MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Read the following extracts and answer the following questions by choosing the most appropriate alternative from those given below :

1. *Oh, I wish I'd looked after me teeth,  
And spotted the perils beneath.  
All the toffees I chewed,*

*And the sweet sticky food,*

*Oh, I wish I'd looked after me teeth.*

(a) 'Spotted' means :

- (i) invented (ii) noticed  
(iii) thought (iv) discovered

(b) The poetic device used in these lines is :

- (i) Simile                      (ii) Irony  
 (iii) Metaphor                (iv) Alliteration  
 (c) "The perils beneath" in line 2 means :

(i) the danger of life  
 (ii) causes of a disease  
 (iii) hidden serious condition  
 (iv) taken care  
**Ans : (a) (ii)                (b) (iv)                (c) (iii)**

2. *When I think of the lollies I licked,  
 And the liquorice all sorts I pricked,  
 Sherbet dabs, big and little,  
 All that had peanut brittle  
 My conscience gets horribly pricked.*

(a) **The poetic device used in these lines is :**

- (i) Metaphor                (ii) Alliteration  
 (iii) Simile                (iv) Irony

(b) **'Brittle' here means :**

- (i) a sweet made from nuts and sugar  
 (ii) a bright coloured thing  
 (iii) hard but liable to break  
 (iv) a small creamy toffee

(c) **'Sherbat dabs' means :**

- (i) perfumed powder  
 (ii) a kind of tiny sweet

- (iii) a kind of sweet dish  
 (iv) a kind of children's game

**Ans : (a) (ii)                (b) (i)                (c) (ii)**

3. *Oh I showed them the toothpaste all right,  
 I flashed it about late at night,  
 But up-and-down brushin'  
 And pokin' and fussin'  
 Didn't seem worth the time I could bite!*

(a) **'Flashed' here means**

- (i) occurrence of a sudden thought  
 (ii) moved in a particular direction  
 (iii) bright lights of traffic  
 (iv) the light of a camera

(b) **'Pokin' and Fussin' here means**

- (i) peeping in someone's room  
 (ii) making fun of someone  
 (iii) being fussy about something  
 (iv) checking carefully

(c) **For the poet, taking care of her teeth meant**

- (i) being extra possessive  
 (ii) wastage of time  
 (iii) doing a worthwhile thing  
 (iv) setting up an example for others

**Ans : (a) (ii)                (b) (iv)                (c) (ii)**

## NON-MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

**Read the following extracts and answer the questions that follow :**

1. *I wish I'd been more willin'  
 When I had more teeth there than fillin'  
 To pass up gobstoppers.  
 From respect to me choppers,  
 And to buy something else with my shillin'.*

[CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

(a) **Name the poem and the poet :**

**Ans.** These lines have been taken from the poem 'Oh, I Wish I'd Looked After My Teeth' composed by Pam Ayres.

(b) **What is the poet's wish ?**

**Ans.** The poetess wishes that she should have looked after her teeth in her childhood.

(c) **What is the rhyme scheme of these lines ?**

**Ans.** The rhyming scheme is aa bb.

2. *So I lay in the old dentist's chair,  
 And I gaze up his nose in despair,  
 And his drill it do whine  
 In these molars of mine  
 "Two amalgum", he'll say "for in there".*

[CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

(a) **What made the poet feel upset ?**

**Ans.** She was upset because she was sitting in a dentist's chair and had to undergo the drilling of her teeth.

(b) **What did the dentist do to the poet's teeth ?**

**Ans.** The dentist drilled the poet's teeth and filled her cavities with a mixture of mercury and silver.

(c) **What does 'two amalgam' mean ?**

**Ans.** It means the mixture of mercury and silver.

3. *"When I had more tooth there than fillin'  
 To pass the gobstoppers"*

(a) **Explain the first line :**

**Ans.** The first line refers to the time when the poet had teeth and no cavities to be filled or otherwise. These were strong good teeth.

(b) **What does 'gobstopper' mean ?**

**Ans.** Gobstopper means a large, hard sweet.

(c) **Why did the poet eat it ?**

**Ans.** The poet in her youth had been very fond of sweets. She was not far-sighted or strong-willed to forego the temptation of eating them. She did not visualise the dangers of cavities and painful teeth and gums.

## SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. "When I had more tooth there than fillin'  
To pass the gobstoppers"

- (i) Explain the first line.
- (ii) What does 'gobstopper' mean?
- (iii) Why did the poet eat it?

**Ans.** (i) The first line refers to the time when the poet had teeth and no cavities to be filled or otherwise. These were strong good teeth.

- (ii) Gobstopper means a large, hard sweet.
- (iii) The poet in her youth had been very fond of sweets. She was not far-sighted or strong-willed to forego the temptation of eating them : She did not visualise the dangers of cavities and painful teeth and gums.

2. "All that hard peanut brittle  
My conscience gets horribly pricked."

- (i) Why did the poet feel guilty?
- (ii) What damage was caused by hard peanut?

**Ans.** "The poet feels guilty when she thinks of all the sweets she had sucked and enjoyed specially peanut brittle which is a hard sweet made from nuts and sugar, which did a lot of damage to her teeth.

The hard peanut brittle damaged her teeth. Constant eating of this hard brittle sweet was not good for her teeth which became weak with time.

3. Why did the poet laugh at her mother's teeth?

**Ans.** The poet laughed at her mothers false teeth which used to be kept in water. She was young irresponsible and quite ignorant of the importance of a good denture in one's life. To her it looked funny. But now finding herself in the same situation she realises their importance.

4. What is 'reckoning' time for the poet? Can it be helped now?

**Ans.** Reckoning means making amends for one's mistakes. The poet neglected her teeth. Now when she

faced with the danger of losing them and a number of painful cavities to deal with, she feels as if the time to give accountability for her negligence had come.

5. Give an appropriate proverb that conveys the message that this poem gives. Relate the proverbs to the poem.

Or

'Prevention is better than cure'. Explain with reference to the poem, 'Oh, I wish I'd looked after my teeth'.  
[CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

No use crying over spilt milk — means you can achieve nothing by lamenting over the loss of something which cannot be retrieved. The poet is now lamenting that she should have taken good care of her teeth at the right time and not succumbed to the temptation of eating too many sticky sweets. She is forgetting that she cannot get her beautiful strong teeth back by regretting her mistakes. The message is that when the opportunity is there, we must take it; once it is lost it cannot be retrieved. This holds good in all situations.

6. What caused cavities in the teeth of the poetess?  
[CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

Or

How is the poetess responsible for spoiling her teeth?  
[CBSE 2010 (Term II)]

The poet was very stubborn and negligent of dental hygiene during childhood. She was careless and never listened to the instructions of her mother. She was too tempted by lollies, candies, sherbets and other sticky sweets. Her mother cautioned her time and again that a tooth is like a friend, and it should be looked after well. But the poet could not resist sweets and thus spoiled her teeth.

## LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. The poet laughed at her mother's false teeth. Now her fate is no less different. Discuss the irony inherent in this situation, giving evidence of the problems the poet would face in future.

**Ans.** The irony concealed in the situation is that having laughed at her mothers false teeth she is now faced with the same situation. She is having serious problems — painful cavities, the need to visit a dentist, lying in his chair undergoing large painful hours of medication, the tedious process of drilling, getting infections, getting the

cavities filled with amalgam and so on.

2. What precautions should be taken to undertake dental care? What is the poet's regret?

**Ans.** Childhood is a period of fancies, gorging on tasty food and it is very difficult to avoid temptation. Sherbets, candies, lollies appear in all hues and tastes and they are enough to tickle the palette and send the taste-buds racing. Children are specially very susceptible to temptations and they are very impulsive as far as food is concerned.

Parents and other elderly people keep advising

youngsters but they do not pay any heed. The poet's mother was very perceptive when she told the poet that our teeth are our best friends, since it is through them that we enjoy all the best things of life. The poet never bothered to use a proper toothbrush or rinse her mouth after every meal. She suffered from weak will-power and could not resist sweet sticky food. After teeth have given way to decay, no amount of up and down strokes help, nor does a new toothbrush perform any miracle. The poet's greatest regret is that she cannot put the clock back as the damage cannot be undone.

So dental hygiene is one of the most important hygiene and it should never be neglected or given secondary importance.

**3. What are the problems faced by the poet after she neglected her teeth ?**

Or

**What is the poet's greatest regret in the poem, 'Oh, I wish I'd looked after my teeth' ?**

**What were the various problems she was confronted with ? Answer in about 150 words.**

[CBSE 2010 (Term I)]

The problems that the poet is facing as a consequence of neglecting her teeth and rather harming them by eating a lot of lollies, liquorice, sherbet, dabs and peanut brittle are — cavities, caps, deterioration of teeth, fillings, infections and drillings. She has to lie in the dentist's chair looking at his nose in despair and undergoing the elaborate treatment of his drilling her molar teeth, getting the cavities filled with a mixture of mercury and silver known as amalgam.

## FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

### (A) WRITING

Design a poster creating awareness regarding dental health and hygiene.

### (B) CONVERSATION SKILLS

There are many health hazards that your parents tell you to avoid. Most of the times, you do not pay any heed.

- Discuss some of them with your neighbour.
- Share with others.

### (C) VISIT

Arrange for a Dental Surgeon's visit to your school.

- Listen to his suggestions/instructions
- Write some of them in your note book
- Take a resolution to follow them

