

Thinking about the Poem (Page 84)

Question 1: Notice the use of the word ‘turn’ in the first line, “I think I could turn and live with animals...”. What is the poet turning from?

Answer: The poet is moving away from people to live with animals because he believes that animals are peaceful, capable of taking care of themselves, and do not complain. He believes that in contrast to animals, people are complex and untrue.

Question 2: Mention three things that humans do and animals don’t.

Answer: Here are the three things listed by the poet that humans do but animals don't:

- Humans constantly express dissatisfaction and moan about little things. Animals, on the other hand, are non-complaining beings that are content with whatever they have.
- Animals are calm creatures who never moan about their circumstances, unlike humans who sweat and work hard to make a living and constantly complain about it.
- People love materialistic items because they make them happy. Animals, on the other hand, are non-demanding beings who do not act irrationally in order to enjoy worldly pleasures.

Question 3: Do humans kneel to other humans who lived thousands of years ago? Discuss this in groups.

Answer: Yes, due to cultural traditions or religious beliefs, people today bow down to people who lived thousands of years ago. They bow before the images of their ancestors and fold their hands in humility as a sign of respect.

(Note: Students can discuss and share their own cultural beliefs with their classmates and also be aware of religious practices of other cultures at the same time.)

Question 4: What are the ‘tokens’ that the poet says he may have dropped long ago, and which the animals have kept for him? Discuss this in class. (Hint: Whitman belongs to the Romantic tradition that includes Rousseau and Wordsworth, which holds that civilization has made humans false to their own true nature. What could be the basic aspects of our nature as living beings that humans choose to ignore or deny?)

Answer: The tokens that Whitman mentions in the poem serve as representations of the fundamental character of people. He wants to make the point that as civilization advanced, people lost touch with their primal instincts and turned away from symbols of virtue like restraint, honesty, and innocence. They grew more self-centered, and their hunger for material goods overcame their better judgement. In due course, they lost their humanitarian touch. Animals, on the other hand, have always followed their true instincts and still do. The poet ponders where he carelessly lost his true nature as he considers those traits.