



12074CH11

2 Keeping Quiet

About the poet

Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) 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.

Before you read

What does the title of the poem suggest to you? What do you think the poem is about?

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.

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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.



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.

to have no truck with : to refuse to associate or deal with, to refuse to tolerate something

Think it out

1. What will counting upto twelve and keeping still help us achieve?
2. Do you think the poet advocates total inactivity and death?
3. What is the 'sadness' that the poet refers to in the poem?
4. What symbol from Nature does the poet invoke to say that there can be life under apparent stillness?

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Try this out

Choose a quiet corner and keep still physically and mentally for about five minutes. Do you feel any change in your state of mind?

Notice the differing line lengths of the stanzas and the shift in thought from stanza to stanza.

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