

# Grade 10 & 11 (*New Syllabus*)

## Appreciation of English Literary Texts

### **The Clown's Wife** *By Johnson Agard*



## John Agard (1949)



Johnson Agard was born in 1949, in Guyana, in the Caribbean (South America). He grew up in Georgetown, British Guiana (now Guyana). He studied English, French and Latin. He worked for the Guyana Sunday Chronicle newspaper as sub-editor and writer of feature articles before moving to England in 1977. He is known as Afro-Guyanese playwright, poet and children's writer. Now he is living in Britain.

He has seen the cultural differences, class divisions, racial stereotypes around him. He deals with the themes such as ethnicity, mythology, morality and technological advancement. At the same time he has used playful, entertaining approach with humor too.

A Critic and novelist David Dabydeen has described Agard's poetry as "a wonderful affirmation of life, in a language that is vital and joyous".

Agard has won Paul Hamlyn Award for Poetry in 1997, the Cholmondeley Award in 2004 and in 2012, he was selected for the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry.



## The Clown's Wife

About my husband, the clown,  
What could I say?

On stage, he's a different person.  
Up there he's a king on a throne,  
But at home you should hear him moan.

The moment he walks through that door  
without that red nose and them funny clothes,  
he seems to have the world on his shoulder.

I do me best to cheer him up, poor soul.  
I juggle with eggs, I turn cartwheels,  
I tell jokes, I do me latest card trick,  
I even have a borrow of his red nose.

But he doesn't say exactly how he feels,  
Doesn't say what's bothering him inside.  
Just sits there saying almost to himself:

' O life, ah life,  
what would I do without this clown of a wife?'



## Glossary

- clown – joker/entertainer
- Juggle - throwing up of balls or any other objects in the air and catching them
- Trick - deceit
- borrow - take for temporary use
- moan - cry, wail



A brief note on the poem.

The poem “The Clown’s Wife”, which comes under the theme of life, is about the life of a clown. The life of the clown is depicted through the eyes of his wife. The poem shows the difference between the appearance and reality. He has a dual personality- his public life and private life. People, the onlookers of the clown, may think that he lives very happily and always smiles as he performs on the stage. But according to the poem it is not so. His happiness is a pretense. His wife says though he is a “king on a throne” he is moaning or crying when he is at home. But the world doesn’t know about that. How pathetic the life of the clown is.

At home the wife plays the role of the clown and tries to make him laugh by doing various tricks and jokes. But he cannot laugh as there is something inside him. He doesn’t say the reason for his grief. Instead he talks to himself and say:

‘ O life, ah life,

what would I do without this clown of a wife?’

## A brief note on the poem.

The image of the clown is sympathetic. The clowns have to put on a happy face before the audience to make them laugh. It is not easy to make others laugh specially while you yourself is suffering or grieving inside. Though he plays the role of an entertainer, as a human being he has many grievances which the others cannot see or understand. On the other hand he is unhappy may be because he gets a low salary for his work.

Moreover, the wife of the clown is presented as caring and loving person in the poem. She tries her best to cheer him up at home. It seems that the wife is a solace to the unhappy life of the clown.

The poet makes the reader aware of the pathetic side of the life of a clown and it can be applicable to lives of the people in general: what we see is always not the true picture. Appearance is not always the reality.

So the poem deals with the difference between appearance and reality and also the hardships and sufferings of the poor.

*Techniques used.*

- **Figurative language**

ex: world on his shoulder

- **Use of simple and colloquial language**
- **Irony**

He gives laughter to the others on the stage but he himself is unhappy and his wife has to cheer him up at home.

- **Contrast of appearance and reality**

*Techniques used.*

- **Exclamations**

ex: “oh - ah”

Exclamations suggest his unhappiness and sadness.

- **Irregular versification**

**The poem consists of 6 verses.**

1st verse – 2 lines

2nd verse – 3 lines

3rd verse – 3 lines

4th verse – 4 lines

5th verse – 3 lines

6th verse – 2 lines



Some questions suggested in T.I.M.

1. Who talks about the clown?
2. How does the clown look like when he is on the stage?
3. How does the clown behave when he comes home?
4. What does the wife do to cheer him up?
5. Does the wife know what goes on inside the husband's mind?
6. What does the clown say to himself? Do you think that he is happy?

## Probable Answers.

1. The wife of the clown.
2. He looks like a king on a throne.
3. He moans.
4. The wife juggle with eggs, turn cartwheels, I tell jokes, do some latest card trick, borrow of his red nose etc.
5. No. She doesn't
6. ' O life, ah life,  
what would I do without this clown of a wife?'  
I think the clown is not happy.