

Eng Lit Question

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1 The Last Lesson by Alphonse Daudet (prose)

1.1 SCHL NOTES

1.1.1 THEME

The story, 'The Last Lesson' covers the themes of patriotism, freedom of language and love for one's mothertongue. The story stresses on the importance of education and the necessity to respect and learn one's own language. It also reflects the unfair practice of linguistic chauvinism (refers to an unreasonable pride in one's own language while disregarding other languages and considering it to be inferior)

1.1.2 BRIEF INTRO

The story is set in the backdrop of the Franco Prussian war in the year 1870 when the Prussian forces under Bismarck attacked and captured France. The French districts of Alsace and Lorraine went into Prussian hands. The new Prussian rulers discontinued the teaching of French in the schools in these two districts. The French teachers were asked to leave. Now M. Hamel, the village teacher could no longer stay in his school. Still, he gave a last lesson to his students with utmost devotion and sincerity. A student of M. Hamel, Franz, who dreaded the French classes and M. Hamel's iron rod, reluctantly came to school that day thinking he would be punished as he had not learnt his lesson on participles. But on reaching school he found a few unusual things. M. Hamel was dressed in his best clothes, which he wore only on inspection and prize days, and a few elderly residents of the village were sitting quietly on the back benches. He soon came to know that this was due to an order from Berlin. Franz realized with deep regret how important French was for him and that this was his last lesson in French. The story depicts the pathos of the whole situation and poignantly captures how people feel when they are deprived of the right to use their own language. The story underscores the significance of language in one's life, for the very existence of a race and how important it is to safeguard it.

1.1.3 TAKEAWAY

1. the story is narrated by a French boy, Franz. He often played truant and disliked going to school. He was scared of his French teacher M. Hamel who was a strict disciplinarian.

1. Character of Franz?

Franz is a young boy, a school student who is not interested in studies . He plays truant; does not learn his lessons; is afraid of his teacher and like most boys of his age, enjoys going to the woods on a bright, sunny

day, listening to the chirping of birds and taking a swim in the Saar. He comes from a humble background and is often sent But we notice in him a complete change when he is told that it is the last lesson M. Hamel will be conducting. Suddenly, he becomes repentant for having wasted his time, for not taking his lessons seriously. He empathises with M. Hamel and even regards him with more respect. Franz is sensitive and feels M. Hamel's pain at being uprooted from an environment he has spent forty years of his life in. When faced with crisis, Franz discovers a love for his mother tongue and begins to take pride in his French identity. He focuses on his lessons and finds them, strangely, easy. Perhaps, it is significant that the author has chosen, for the narrator, a name which echoes the name of the nation.

2. **What does the Franz's apprehension about the pigeon being taught to coo in German imply ? What Franz apprehends regarding future of the pigeon is not unique to Alsace?**

After Germany's occupy Alsace and Lorrien they imposed German and ordered that French would no longer be taught in the schools of Alsace. It was indeed a ploy to rob the ppl of their cultural identity. Franz, a little boy from Alsace, who had had much interest in his lessons was in M Hamel's class when he heard his teacher say that it was going to be his last lesson. That was when the severity of the German oppression struck him. He wondered if the Germans would make the pigeons coo in German. The thought implied how ruthless and undemocratic the Prussian authorities were. It was as if the Govt. decided to take away from the ppl what came most naturally to them and impose an alien way of life. It would be as bizarre as the pigeons cooing in German. It suggests Franz's sense of wonder when he thought of the extent to which the Germans could go in order to exercise control over and oppress the ppl of Alsace. They had decided to rob the ppl of their fundamental rights the teaching and the use of their mother tongue.

Such an instance was not unique to Alsace counting similar happened in Bangladesh (East Pakistan). Pakistan was decided to impose Urdu as the sole state language and exclusive medium of instructions in schools and colleges. There was a widespread protest and on 21st April in 1952 students gathered in University of Dhaka. The protest became intense and police broke up fire when a group of students into the fire.

3. **PROCRASTINATION IS THE THIEF OF TIME, A PURPOSEFUL CHOICE TO PUT OFF A TASK FOR A LATER TIME. HOW DID THIS PRACTICE OF PROCRASTINATION AFFECT FRANZ AND THE ELDERLY PEOPLE OF ALSACE?**

On reaching school, Franz was surprised to see the elderly people of the village, sitting at the back of M Hamel's classroom. M Hamel's declaration that it was going to be their last French lesson, shocked Franz. He saw old Hauser, holding a primer open in his hands. Franz realised that elderly people of the village, many of whom must have been M Hamel's students in

their youth, had come not only to show their gratitude towards a dedicated teacher but out of a sense of remorse at having wasted precious time. They had neglected the study of their mother tongue, when they had time. A similar feeling was aroused in Franz after M Hamel's announcement, as he realised, with pain, that he was largely ignorant of the nuances of the French language.

M Hamel was repentant that he did not utilise time better. He often sent his students to water the plants in his garden or declared a holiday when he wished to go fishing. M Hamel was also critical of the attitude of the adults in general, who put off learning for "tomorrow." He refused to blame little Franz alone, for his ignorance since his parents often sent him to work in a farm or at the mills. Thus we see how the habit of procrastination can steal time. We allow ourselves to be robbed of time only to be overwhelmed by a sense of loss, regret and guilt, since we have only ourselves to blame.

4. DO YOU THINK THE STORY TOUCHES UPON THE BRUTALITIES OF WAR? COMMENT.

The story 'The Last Lesson' is set in the backdrop of the Franco-Prussian war and it narrates a situation when a part of France, the districts of Alsace and Lorraine, were occupied by the Prussians. The people of Alsace lost their freedom, their sovereignty but, most importantly, they stood on the threshold of losing their cultural identity. Order had come from Berlin that French would no longer be taught in the schools of Alsace. German would be taught, instead. M Hamel, a French teacher in Alsace, who had spent forty years teaching French to the people of Alsace, was asked to leave the country. So, Prussian brutality was not just limited to the occupation of land and taking over political power. They tried to impose a system which would slowly but surely, take away from the people of Alsace, their French identity. It would create a generation that would not know how to read and write French, well. They would remain ignorant of the wealth of French literature. There can be nothing more brutal than taking away from the people their cultural identity, their freedom to learn and teach their mother tongue. M Hamel was the victim of another brutality – he was uprooted from a place where he had lived for forty years. He was ordered to leave the country. War often results in such severance from one's social milieu; from what one calls 'home.'

5. WHAT MESSAGE IS CONVEYED BY THE STORY? HOW IS IT RELEVANT TODAY?

The story, 'The Last Lesson' conveys some powerful messages. It urges us to value something while we have it. We often take things for granted and remain blissfully ignorant of their significance. Only when we stand on the threshold of losing them, that we realise their value. Similarly the people of Alsace had taken their French lessons, rather casually. Franz even believed that M Hamel was 'cranky.' It was only on the day of the last

lesson that he listened to m Hamel with attention and found his lessons rather easy. His perspective of M Hamel changed and he even regarded his master with more respect than before.

The story also conveys the message that one must be proud of one's own identity as a part of a community and one's mother tongue is an inseparable aspect of that identity. We must learn our mother tongue and immerse ourselves in the study of its literature so that we get to know our roots and learn about our culture.

In today's society, such a message is highly relevant. Today, the prospect of economic prosperity drives human actions and we often aim our studies with economic success in mind. In the Indian society, the knowledge of English promises professional success. The craze to study English has overshadowed regional languages and their practice. People do not take pride in studying their mother tongue, thereby gradually alienating themselves from their roots, their culture.

2 My Mother at 66 by Kamala Das(poetry)

1. Analysis:-

Kamala Das' poetry often have autobiographical elements. In spite of being an Indian writer writing in the 1960s, Kamala Das was able to break free from conservatism and middle class morality. She has a strong voice which is uninhibited and is not afraid to express the perspectives of a woman, which often did not find expression in her time, in the male dominated genre of Indian writers writing in English.

'My Mother at Sixty Six' is a poem triggered by a moment of epiphany – a moment when the poet realised that her mother was old and perhaps her end was near. The poem is about how the poet reacts to the thought of her mother's approaching end.

The poet was driving from her parent's home to the Cochin airport on Friday morning, her mother beside her, dozing with her mouth open. She was sixty six years old, looked as pale as a corpse and a sudden realisation dawned upon the poet that her mother was "as old as she looked." The expression suggests that the Mother's age was not merely apparent. Senility had set in. It suggests that the poet's mother was old, senile, her health, fragile and perhaps she was approaching her end. This thought of losing her mother was unbearable and the poet could feel the pain gnawing within her.

To distract herself from such painful thoughts, the poet looked outside and saw the "Young Trees sprinting" and the merry children "spilling out of their homes." The trees were "young", in contrast to her aged mother and so were the children – young and full of life. In contrast to the immobility of the poet's mother; in contrast to her lack of energy and vitality, we have the image of the trees "sprinting" and the children "spilling" out of their homes, to play. The poet believed that the scenes outside would help her to

distract herself from the very painful thoughts of her mother's impending death. But could the images really help in distracting her? Perhaps the very contrasting images reminded the poet, more emphatically, of her mother's senility and her approaching end. We can say so because, even after the security check at the airport, the poet's melancholy thoughts sustained. After the poet reached the airport and completed the security check, she looked at her mother once again and saw her "wan, pale" face. She looked like the "late winter's moon"—an appropriate comparison, which suggests her age, her frailty and her senility, reflected in her pale, ashen face. Winter is the last season in the cycle, marked by desolation. It is often associated with old age and death. Metaphorically, the poet's mother was in the 'winter of her life.' Moreover, the moon, seen through the haze and mist of winter appears dull, pale and lack lustre. Thus, it is an apt analogy for the poet's aged mother.

The poet remembered that when she was a child, like any other child, she also shuddered at the thought of losing her mother. A similar fear gripped her after all these years, because, as she said farewell to her mother, at the airport, she doubted if she would ever see her mother again. But she hid her fears behind a smile. Unlike a child who cannot hide her fears and insecurities, the poet did not let the Mother know how she was feeling then, and tried her best to remain optimistic. All she did was tell her mother that she would meet her again, soon. Thus she smiled and kept on smiling as long as she could see her mother, trying to convince herself that her fear was unfounded.