Vikram’s English Academy (ICSE)

Notes: The Sniper

1. **When and where is the story set?**

Ans: This story is set during the early weeks of the Irish Civil War during the battle of Dublin in the years 1922-1923.

1. **Describe the opening scene of the story.**

Ans: It was the month of June and the time was late evening when twilight had faded into the night. Dublin lay enveloped in darkness but there was the faint light of the moon which was shining through fleecy clouds. This pale light made it look as if dawn was about to break over the streets and the dark waters of the river Liffey.

1. **Bring out the description of the ongoing war from the beginning of the lesson.**

Ans: There was heavy firing going on around the beleaguered (captured) Four Courts. The occasional sound of machine guns pierced the silence of the night. The sound of the machine guns was spasmodic like dogs barking on silent isolated farms. The opposite parties of the civil war were the Republicans and Free Starters.

1. **Where was the Sniper, the central character of the story? Which party did he belong to ?**

Ans: The sniper was on a rooftop near O’Connell Bridge. He was a Republican.

1. **Describe the Sniper.**

Ans: The sniper lay on the rooftop watching. Beside him lay his rifle and over his shoulders was slung a pair of field glasses. His face was like that of a student, thin and ascetic, but his eyes had the cold gleam of a fanatic. They were deep and thoughtful, the eye of a man who is used to looking at death.

1. **Besides eating a sandwich and drinking some whiskey what else did he want to do? Why was it a risk? Did he take the risk?**

Ans: Besides eating a sandwich and drinking some whiskey, he wanted to smoke. This was a risk as he was hiding and the light of the smoke could give away his hiding position and the enemy might be successful in shooting him. Nevertheless, he decided to take the risk.

1. **What happened as soon as the sniper started smoking? What did he do?**

Ans: As soon as the sniper started smoking, a bullet struck the parapet of the roof on which he was lying. He took another whiff and put out the cigarette. Then he swore softly and crawled away to his left.

1. **What or who came across the bridge? What was the reaction of the sniper?**

Ans: An armoured car came across the bridge and advanced slowly up the street and stopped on the opposite side of the street, fifty yards ahead. The sniper’s heart beat faster as it was an enemy car. He wanted to fire but he knew it was useless. His bullets would never pierce the steel of car.

1. **Describe the woman who went to the car. According to the sniper who was she?**

Ans: An old woman went to the car from round the corner of a side street. Her head was covered by a tattered shawl. She began to talk to the man in the turret of the car. She was pointing to the roof where the sniper lay. The sniper realized she was an informant.

1. **What happened after the woman went near the car? What action did the sniper take?**

Ans: After the woman went near the car, she began to talk to the man in the turret of the car. She was pointing to the roof where the sniper lay. The sniper knew she was an informer. The turret opened. A man’s head and shoulders appeared looking toward the sniper. The sniper raised his rifle and fired. The head fell heavily on the turret wall. The woman darted toward the side street. The sniper then fired at the woman who whirled round and fell with a shriek into the gutter.

1. **How was the sniper injured? What happened when the bullet hit him?**

Ans: After the sniper had shot the man in the turret of the car and the old woman who was an informer, a shot rang out from the opposite roof and the bullet hit the sniper’s forearm. The sniper dropped his rifle with a curse. The rifle clattered to the roof. The sniper thought the noise would wake the dead. He stooped to pick the rifle up but couldn’t life it. His forearm had become numb with the injury.

1. **What traits does the sniper exhibit after being wounded?**

Ans: After being shot by his enemy, the sniper exhibits a number of traits. Firstly, he shows his self-reliant and practical nature by attending to his injury. He tears off his sleeve and cleans the wound with iodine and then dresses it inspite of the excruciating pain. This shows how strong a person he is. Secondly, he also exhibits his intelligence by developing a plan to escape inspite of being severely injured in his arm.

1. **Describe the sniper’s ruse to kill the other enemy sniper.**

Ans: After being injured, the sniper lay still for a long time nursing his wounded arm and planning escape. He realized that he must not be found wounded on the roof. At the same time the enemy on the opposite roof prevented his escape. He then thought of a plan. Taking off his cap, he placed it over the muzzle of his rifle. Then he pushed the rifle slowly upward over the parapet, until the cap was visible from the opposite side of the street. Immediately the enemy shot and a bullet pierced the centre of the cap. The sniper then slanted the rifle and the cap fell down. Then catching the riffle in the middle, the sniper dropped his left hand over the roof and let it hang, lifelessly. After a few moments he let the rifle drop to the street. Then he sank to the roof, dragging his hand with him. The enemy now thought that the sniper was dead and stood before a row of chimney pots, looking across with his head shadowed against the western sky. The sniper shot him with his revolver above the edge of the parapet with a flawless aim.

1. **What change becomes apparent in the sniper after he succeeds in killing his opponent? How do you explain this change?**

Ans: Once the sniper confirms that his opponent has been hit, he utters ‘a cry of joy’ and watches him die. The immediate elation is followed by remorse and anger- at himself, at others and at the war as a whole. The joy experienced is understandable because the sniper would have been killed by the enemy if he had not done so. The remorse and cursing is also justified as it is not easy to bear the burden of killing and taking lives.

1. **How did he overcome the change in his thoughts?**

Ans: In a fit of anger, the sniper looked at the smoking revolver in his hand and with an oath he hurled it to the roof at his feet. The revolver went off with a concussion and the bullet whizzed past the sniper’s head. He was frightened back to his senses by the shock. His nerves steadied. The cloud of fear scattered from his mind and he laughed.

1. **What message does Liam O’Flaherty convey through the story ‘The Sniper’?**

Ans: Liam O’Flaherty has brought out the futility of war through this story ‘The Sniper’. Initially the sniper is committed to his mission and thus he does not even think once about who could be on the other side. Later it is realized by him that the person whom he had killed was his own brother. This shows that war is impersonal and does not respect relations. The enemy has no face or identity and the people on either side are mere objects to be finished. The sniper too is a victim of war, a mere pawn in the hands of larger forces. War brings about a split in families and shatters loyalties.