WORSHEET 1: THE LAST LESSON by Alphonse Daudet  
  
Answer the following questions in 30-40 words:

1. Why was Franz scared to attend the school? What was the temptation outside the classroom?
2. Where was the bulletin board? What was its importance?
3. What was so unusual about the school? Why was it so?
4. Who occupied the last bench in the classroom? Why?
5. What was the order from Berlin? How did it change Franz’s attitude towards French?
6. What happened when Franz was asked to recite the rules for the participles? How did M. Hamel react to it?
7. What was Hamel’s opinion about the French language?
8. Who does M Hamel blame for not learning French?
9. What happened when the lesson on writing was going on?
10. What did Franz notice about his teacher during the writing lesson? What realisations dawned upon him?
11. How did the lesson in History progress?
12. What happened when the church clock struck 12?
13. How did Hamel end the class?

Space for notes.

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Long answer questions. 120-150 words (including value based question)

1. Our language is part of our culture and we are proud of it. Describe how regretful M. Hamel and the village elders are for having neglected their native language?
2. “Will they make them sing in German, even the….?” What does ‘them’ refer to and what is the sentiment behind this line?
3. Why did M Hamel write ‘Vive la France!’? What values of patriotism do you learn from his actions?
4. “When a people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language, it is as if they have a key to their prison.’ Explain.
5. “We’ve all a great deal to reproach ourselves with.” Why did M Hamel say this? What values do we learn from this?

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ANSWER KEY

Short answers

1. Franz was scared to attend school as he was unprepared for the question on participles. He was tempted to spend the day out as the chirping birds at the edge of the forest and Prussian soldiers drilling in the open field at the back of the saw mill were more inviting than the classroom. However, he resisted the temptation and rushed to school.
2. The bulletin board was in front of the town hall. In the last two years all bad news regarding lost battles, the draft and orders of the commanding officer had come from the bulletin board.
3. Usually, the school was in great commotion but on that particular day it was so quite that it looked as if it was Sunday morning. M. Hamel was wearing his beautiful green coat, frilled shirt and black silk cap that he wore on inspection and prize days. Moreover, the back benches were occupied by villagers.
4. The last benches in the classroom were occupied by old Hauser, the former Mayor, former post master and several others. They were there to attend the last lesson in French. It was their way of respecting M. Hamel and his contribution to French.
5. The order from Berlin was to stop teaching French in all places and replace it with German instead. This order made Franz realise how he had taken his language for granted and how he would miss it. He realised that he hadn’t learnt French and his book, that had seemed too heavy to carry, looked like old friends. He felt sad about M. Hamel.
6. When Franz was asked to recite the rules of the participle, he got confused and couldn’t speak after the first few words. He got so scared that he couldn’t even look up. Hamel didn’t scold him for not learning the participle since he understood that Franz must be feeing worse than him.
7. M Hamel felt that French was the most beautiful, most logical language in the world. He gave utmost importance to the heritage of a shared language. To him, knowing the language of ones people was the key to freedom.
8. M Hamel blamed all the people of Alsace for postponing the learning of their language. He blamed the parents for sending their children to work rather than sending them to school to study. He also blamed himself for giving them holidays and assigning them his garden work, thus neglecting teaching.
9. When the lesson in writing was going on, it was quiet as everyone was busy writing “France, Alsace, France, Alsace…” Nobody paid any attention to the beetles flying in the classroom, not even the littlest ones. The only sound was that of the scratching of the pens over paper.
10. When Franz looked up from his writing work, he found M Hamel sitting motionless with his fixed gaze moving from one thing to another as if he wanted to memorise how everything looked in that school room. He thought how his teacher had spent 40 years in the same place. He realised how painful it must be for Hamel to leave the place the next day.
11. The lesson in history progressed after the writing. Soon after that the babies recited their *ba, be, bi bo, bu*. Even the old Hauser had out on his spectacles and was spelling the letters with the kids. He was overwhelmed with emotions and was crying.
12. When the church clock struck 12, the trumpets of the Prussians returning from drill were heard. That was an indication to end the lesson. M Hamel stood up. He looked very confident. He wanted to say something but was choked with emotion.
13. M. Hamel, overcome with emotion, stood up to say something but couldn’t bring himself to it. Instead he juts wrote the words “Vive la France” on the board. He leaned his head against the wall and made a gesture to his class saying “school is dismissed- you may go”.

Long Answers

1. M Hamel blamed himself and the natives for neglecting French. He regretted giving them holidays when he wanted to go fishing. He felt sorry for assigning them the work of watering his garden. The parents were blamed for sending their children to work at ferns rather than study in school. The elders showed their regrets by sitting in the classroom for the last French lesson quietly at the back. They wanted to express their gratitude towards Hamel for giving 40 years of service to teach the children of Alsace. M Hamel appealed that thy hold fast to their language as it was their key to freedom. M Hamel explained everything with utmost patience, as if he wanted to give them all the knowledge of the French language before going away. The children and the villagers sat attentively in the classroom, hanging on to every word that the master spoke. They too, felt guilty for not having paid enough attention to this very important aspect of their country. And now that it was being taken away from them, they thought they could assimilate as much as possible in this last lesson.
2. When the writing lesson was going on the day of the Last Lesson, Franz heard some pigeons cooing on the roof and he thought to himself, “Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons.” Them, here, refers to the pigeons and the sentiment behind this line is the oppression of imposition of language. It was true that the states of Alsace and Lorraine had been taken under the control of Germans but it was not fair to impose German on the people. It as a as unnatural as teaching pigeons to coo in another language. Franz, who did not like to study French, suddenly developed interest for his native language and realised that he had not learnt enough to call himself a Frenchman. And now the order from Berlin had come not to teach French anymore. The political defeat of the French provinces also signified the cultural hegemony of the Germans.
3. When the Last Lesson ended at the 12th hour of the day and the Prussian soldiers marched towards the town, M Hamel stood up to say something. However, he was overwhelmed by his emotions and in this emotional turmoil couldn’t speak, so he took a piece of chalk and using his strength he wrote, ‘ Vive la France’ as large as he could. The surge of patriotism made him do so. He expressed his love for his country and the language by teaching the Last Lesson with utmost patience, making it easier and clearer to understand. The words Vive la France mean ‘Long Live France’. He had also appealed to the villagers and the students to safeguard French among themselves. He had stated that as long as people held fast to their language, it was as if they had the key to their freedom. This also shows how much m Hamel loved and respected his country and was a true patriot.
4. The order from Berlin, stating only to teach German in the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine had a drastic effect on the population. M Hamel, the French teacher who had given 40 years of his service teaching in a school in Alsace taught his Last Lesson in French to the students and the villagers. He spoke about the French language which he considered the most logical and beautiful language in the world. He made an appeal to the people to guard it amongst themselves because when people are under foreign control, if they hold fast to their native roots and protect their culture and language, they have a fair chance of getting their freedom. Holding fast to one’s language is like holding the key to one’s prison. It is only when they have amongst themselves this uniting factor that they can rise up to their oppressors as one and demand their freedom.
5. During the Last Lesson M Hamel realised that his students didn’t know French, he said that they had all a great deal to reproach themselves with. He held the parents, students and himself responsible for ignoring the importance of their mother tongue. According to him, the problem with Alsace was that the children kept on postponing their learning for the next day and now there was no tomorrow, as bleak as that sounded. The parents were held culprit for making their kids work rather than allowing them to attend school. He blamed himself for assigning the children to garden work and giving them off days whenever he wished to go fishing. We learn from this that one should never put off things for tomorrow as tomorrow never comes. We learn from this, the values of preserving one’s culture and thus, staying united with our fellow countrymen in times of trouble.