

Prose – The Portrait of a Lady

Page No. 6

Understanding The Text

Mention

1. The three phases of the author's relationship with his grandmother before he left the country to study abroad.

Answer:

The three phases of the relationship of the author with his grandmother before leaving the country to study abroad are:

- (i) Early childhood – His grandmother helped him while getting ready and went to the village school along with him.
- (ii) Boyhood – He shared a room with his grandmother when he studied at the city school. She was not able to help him in his studies.
- (iii) Early youth – The link of their friendship snapped when he was provided a separate room at the university.

2. Three reasons why the author's grandmother was disturbed when he started going to the city school.

Answer:

The three reasons why the grandmother of the author was disturbed when he went to the city school are:

1. She did not like Western learning and Science.
2. She was hurt when she came to know that there were no scriptures and teachings of God there.
3. She did not like music and thought that it was not for gentlefolk and decent people. In her opinion, it was the monopoly of beggars and prostitutes.

3. Three ways in which the author's grandmother spent her days after he grew up.

Answer:

Three ways how the grandmother of the author spent her days after he grew up are:

1. She accepted the loneliness and lived unaccompanied in the room.
2. She would recite prayers while sitting at the spinning wheel.
3. She fed the sparrows for half an hour every afternoon.

4. The odd way in which the author's grandmother behaved just before she died.

Answer:

The grandmother of the author did not speak to them before her death. The night before she died, she did not pray while singing homecoming songs and beating the drum, as she was not ready to waste time. She laid peacefully in her bed praying and telling beads and ignored the protests of her family members.

5. The way in which the sparrows expressed their sorrow when the author's grandmother died.

Answer:

**NCERT Solutions Class 11 English Hornbill Reading Skills Chapter 1 –
The Portrait of a Lady**

The dead body of the author's grandmother was surrounded by thousands of sparrows which did not chirrup. They did not even notice the bread crumbs which were thrown by the author's mother to feed them. They quietly flew away once the corpse of the grandmother was carried away. Hence, this way the sparrows expressed their sorrow when the author's grandmother died.

Talking About The Text

Talk to your partner about the following.

1. The author's grandmother was a religious person. What are the different ways in which we come to know this?

Answer:

The grandmother of the author was a deeply religious person. This can be known from the different ways of her behaviour. Every morning, she visited the temple and read the scriptures. She always mumbled inaudible prayers at home and kept telling the rosary beads. She constantly repeated prayers like a song while helping the author get ready for school. She wished that the author would learn it by heart. She did not like the English school as there was no teaching of scriptures and God.

She would recite prayers even while spinning in her spinning wheel. Once, she forgot to say her prayers. Prior to her death, she felt over-excited in the evening while celebrating her grandson's arrival with beatings of drums and songs. She continued telling beads of rosary and praying till her last breath.

2. Describe the changing relationship between the author and his grandmother. Did their feelings for each other change?

Answer:

The author was entirely dependent on his grandmother during his boyhood. She was an important part of his life. However, a turning point came in their friendship when they moved to the city. As he went to school by bus, she was not able to accompany him. She could not help him in his studies though they shared the same room. She used to ask him what his teachers taught him and did not believe in the things which were taught at school. She was pained that he was not taught about scriptures and God. As music was being taught, she felt offended and expressed her disapproval silently. She rarely spoke to the author after this. The link of their friendship was snapped as he was given a separate room when he went to the university. However, their feelings towards each other did not change. They loved one another deeply. When he left the country and moved abroad for higher studies, she went to the railway station to send him off. She quietly kissed his forehead and showed no emotion. This was valued by the author as it was the last sign of physical interaction between them. After five years, when the author returned, she received him at the station. She clasped the author in her arms and celebrated his homecoming in the evening by beating an old drum and singing songs.

3. Would you agree that the author's grandmother was a person strong in character? If yes, give instances that show this.

Answer:

Yes, I agree that the grandmother of the author was a person with a strong character. She was a woman with strong beliefs. Though she was not educated formally, she was serious about the education of the author. She was not able to adjust herself to the western lifestyle, English and Science education. She did not like music and disapproved of its teaching in schools.

She was a religious woman whose lips were always moving in a silent prayer and was telling the beads of her rosary. She daily went to the temple and read scriptures. When she got to know that there was no teaching of scriptures and God at New English School of Khushwant, she was distressed.

**NCERT Solutions Class 11 English Hornbill Reading Skills Chapter 1 –
The Portrait of a Lady**

She was a kind woman who used to feed the dogs in the village. She was feeding sparrows in the city. Though weak in body and old in age, she had a strong mind. She refused to talk to the family members before her death as she was not ready to waste her time. She wanted to make up the time she did not pray to God the previous evening. She laid peacefully in bed telling the beads of rosary and saying prayers until her last breath.

4. Have you known someone like the author's grandmother? Do you feel the same sense of loss with regard to someone whom you have loved and lost?

Answer:

Yes, my grandfather had looked after me and loved me deeply. Before retirement, he served in the army 20 years as a Colonel. He was still smart and active when I was a school-going kid. He was more interested in jogging, walking and playing games outdoors. He used to inspire us by waking up early in the morning. He believed that a healthy body comes from a healthy mind. He taught us a few physical exercises followed by nourishing food and milk and asked us to study for some time before going to school. He used to enquire about what we had been taught at school, in the afternoon. He helped us while doing our homework and supervised our writing, reading and solving problems. He was gentle, but firm and stressed on the building of good character and habits. When I left the country for higher studies, he passed away. When I see his photograph on the wall, a sense of loss fills my heart. But his looks cheer me to stay strong and fight the struggles of life.

Thinking About Language

1. Which language do you think the author and his grandmother used while talking to each other?

Answer:

The grandmother of the author was not educated. I think the author and his grandmother used Punjabi, which was their mother tongue while talking to each other.

2. Which language do you use to talk to elderly relatives in your family?

Answer:

The elderly relatives in my family are well versed in Hindi and English. I greet them in English and converse with them in Hindi.

3. How would you say 'a dilapidated drum' in your language?

Answer:

'Phata-purana dhol' is the expression used to say 'a dilapidated drum' in my language.

4. Can you think of a song or a poem in your language that talks of homecoming?

Answer:

There are numerous poems and folk songs that sing of the exploits of the brave warriors. All these talks of the homecoming of the warriors after winning a war.

Working With Words

I. Notice the following uses of the word 'tell' in the text.

1. Her fingers were busy *telling the beads* of her rosary.
2. I would *tell her* English words and little things of Western science and learning.
3. At her age *one could never tell*.

4. She *told us* that her end was near.

Given below are four different senses of the word 'tell'. Match the meanings to the uses listed above.

1. make something known to someone in spoken or written words
2. count while reciting
3. be sure
4. give information to somebody

Answer:

Phrases	Meaning
1. telling the beads	count while reciting
2. tell her	give information to somebody
3. one could never tell	be sure
4. told us	make something known to someone in spoken or written words

II. Notice the different senses of the word 'take'.

1. to take to something: to begin to do something as a habit
2. to take ill: to suddenly become ill

Locate these phrases in the text and notice the way they are used.

Answer:

In the text, these phrases are used as follows:

1. to take to: She took to feeding sparrows in the courtyard of our city house.
2. take ill: The next morning she was taken ill.

III. The word 'hobble' means to walk with difficulty because the legs and feet are in bad condition.

Tick the words in the box below that also refer to a manner of walking.

haggle	shuffle	stride	ride	waddle
wriggle	paddle	swagger	trudge	slog

Answer:

The words in the box that also refer to a manner of walking are:

- shuffle
- stride
- swagger
- waddle
- trudge

Noticing Form

Notice the form of the verbs italicised in these sentences.

1. My grandmother was an old woman. She *had been* old and wrinkled for the twenty years that I *had known* her. People said that she *had once been* young and pretty and *had even had* a husband, but that was hard to believe.
2. When we both *had finished* we would walk back together.
3. When I came back she would ask me what the teacher *had taught* me.
4. It was the first time since I *had known* her that she did not pray.
5. The sun was setting and *had lit* her room and verandah with a golden light.

These are examples of the past perfect forms of verbs. When we recount things in the distant past we use this form.

Answer:

Notice the form of verbs highlighted in the sentences below:

1. They **had already reached** their destination when the rain came.
2. Before she left me, we **had worked** together for six months on that project.
3. The teacher **had explained** the poem twice, to help students understand it well.
4. Since I **had lived** there it was the first time it began to rain.
5. The full moon in the sky **had scattered** its light everywhere.

Things to do

Talk with your family members about elderly people who you have been intimately connected with and who are not there with you now. Write a short description of someone you liked a lot.

Answer:

My grandfather

I was eleven years old when I lost my grandfather, but I still remember him. I liked him a lot and he loved me affectionately. Though he was old, he was able to move with ease. During his visits to the market, temple, garden or friends and relatives house, I was his constant companion. I was made fun of by my family members as grandpa's watch dog. I ran to his arms when my mother or father were angry or cross with me. I miss the stories which he used to tell me during bedtime that included deeds of adventure or bravery. He was also careful about my studies and health. In order to maintain a good physique, he would make me eat fruits and drink milk. He helped me write the alphabet and was good at drawing. He gave quick solutions to all my problems. When I succeeded in sports, studies, recitation, song, fancy dress competition or poster making, he would bless me. I miss him a lot.

Poem – A Photograph

Page No. 11

Infer the meanings of the following words from the context

paddling

transient

Now look up the dictionary to see if your inference is right.

Answer:

Paddling is rowing a boat or walking in shallow water.

Transient refers to temporary.

Dictionary Meaning:

Paddling is standing or walking in shallow water with bare feet.

Paddling also means rowing a boat.

Paddling is swimming with short movements of feet or hands up and down.

Transient is staying in a place for a short period of time.

Think it Out

1. What does the word ‘cardboard’ denote in the poem? Why has this word been used?

Answer:

In the poem, the word ‘cardboard’ indicates the photograph which is glued on a paper that is hard and thick. It has been used to describe the old practices when the photographs were glued on cardboard and framed with glass in front in order to preserve them.

2. What has the camera captured?

Answer:

The camera has captured three girls – the mother of the poet and her two cousins, Dolly and Betty, in their swimming dress on either side of the poet’s mother holding her hands and walking with feet in sea water.

3. What has not changed over the years? Does this suggest something to you?

Answer:

Over the years, the sea has not changed. Its waves are tireless, shining and fresh as they were in the old days. The changes that occur in a human face with growing age is reminded by the changelessness of the sea.

4. The poet’s mother laughed at the snapshot. What did this laugh indicate?

Answer:

This laugh indicates her joy at remembering the incident that connected with her past life, when she was young and free from worries and tensions of life.

5. What is the meaning of the line “Both wry with the laboured ease of loss.”

Answer:

The poet’s mother’s laughter and the sea holiday are the incidents from the past. A sense of loss is connected with them. Both are amusing and disappointing as a relaxed or comfortable feeling is a forced one or unnatural. This sense of loss is painful to bear. Also, the phrase ‘laboured ease’ is an oxymoron because it joins together two opposite ideas to make a meaningful idea, here, the sense of loss.

6. What does “this circumstance” refer to?

Answer:

“This circumstance” refers to the death of the poet’s mother.

7. The three stanzas depict three different phases. What are they?

Answer:

1. Girlhood of the poet’s mother – The phase before the poet’s birth.
2. Middle age – The phase during the poet’s childhood.
3. Death – The phase after the death of the poet’s mother.



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