

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 5: PRINCESS SEPTEMBER



PRINCESS SEPTEMBER

~Summary~

-by Somerset Maugham

"Princess September" is written by **Somerset Maugham**, abridged from "**Princess September and the Nightingale**". Like usual Maugham's works, this story is based on the **conflict of human emotions**.

The **King and Queen of Siam** give birth to **several daughters** and name them in the order of the months, with the last being **Princess September (the Protagonist)**. On one of his birthdays, the King presents to each of his daughters a **parrot in a golden cage**. The parrots become much talked about in the palace until September's parrot dies in the cage, and she befriends a **Nightingale** out of the blue.



While the parrots can **only utter a few words**, the songbird can **enchant the crowd with distinctive songs**. The Nightingale **now grabs all the attention**, much to the **dismay** of the other eight princesses. Hence the sisters **manipulate** September into **shutting the bird in a cage**, citing the **hawks and snares** in the kingdom.

The songbird's **plea** goes in **vain**. Nevertheless, the bird is locked in a cage, thereby **refusing to sing or eat**. However, on witnessing the bird's **plight**, September goes **against** her sisters' **misadvise** to free the bird. The bird, in return, **promises to visit** her often and **sticks to its vow**.

The bird, when let free, comes back with the **loveliest of songs**. The rapport between the bird and Princess **grows beautifully**, and so does the Princess. On the other hand, the eight princesses grow to be **ugly and disagreeable**.

At the end of the story, Princess September is married to the **King of Cambodia**, being carried off on a **white elephant** while the other eight princesses are married off to the less-worthy **councillors of the King** with a **pound of tea** and a **Siamese cat**.

~Conclusion~

Princess September teaches students that freedom is the birth right of every living being. No amount of expensive items, money or worldly comforts can make up for the loss of freedom of any living creature. Presenting the CBSE Class 8 English It So Happened Prose Summary of Princess September that must have helped 8th standard students to have a detailed understanding of the chapter.

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NCERT SOLUTIONS**Questions (Page No. 38)
(Comprehension Check - I)**

Question 1. How many daughters did the royal couple have?

Answer: The royal couple of Siam had nine daughters who were named after the months of a year.

Question 2. Why were they named after the months of the year?

Answer: The princesses were named after the months of the year because the Queen of Siam found it difficult to remember so many names. Hence, the King decided to name the princesses as per the months of a calendar year.

Question 3. The King had a peculiar habit. What was it? Why is it called peculiar?

Answer: The King had a peculiar habit of giving gifts instead of receiving gifts on his birthday. In one such year on his birthday, he gave each of his daughters a green parrot in a golden cage.

As a matter of fact, people receive gifts instead of giving away gifts on their birthday. But the King followed an opposite tradition and due to this reason, his habit was peculiar.

Question 4.

- a. What was Princess September's reaction to the loss of her parrot?
- b. What was her mother's reaction to it?
- c. What do the reactions indicate about the nature and temperament of each?

Answer:

- a. When Princess September locked her parrot in the golden cage gifted by her father, the poor bird soon died. She burst into a flood of tears and wept continuously at the loss of her dear parrot. Even her Maids of Honour couldn't comfort her pain.

- b. Her mother said that Princess September's weeping was utter nonsense. In a heartless manner, she asked the Maids of Honour to put the girl to sleep without any supper.
- c. From the nature and temperament of each reaction, we understand that Princess September was a very sensitive and simple-hearted girl. She was grief-stricken when her parrot died. On the contrary, the Queen mother appeared to be unmoved by the death of the parrot and her daughter's grief and she did nothing to console her child.

Question 5. What pulled the Princess out of her gloom?

Answer: The Princess was really upset and depressed over the sudden demise of her parrot and wept continuously. While she lay in her bed crying, she saw a little bird hop into her room. She wiped her tears and watched the little bird sing a beautiful song. This pulled the Princess out of her gloom.

Question 6. How did the Maids of Honour come to know that the Princess and the bird had become intimate friends?

Answer: The next morning when the Maids of Honour brought in the Princess's breakfast, they noticed her in a good mood. They saw that a song bird ate rice out of the Princess's hand and had his bath in her saucer. After that, the little bird sang a beautiful song and the Princess thoroughly enjoyed it. Seeing this, they were convinced that the two had become good friends.

Question 7. The new bird was full of new songs but the old parrots always repeated themselves. What did they say?

Answer: The little bird sang a different and new song every time. On the other hand, all the old parrots were taught two phrases – 'God save the King' and 'Pretty Polly' in seven different Oriental languages. They would say the same phrases repeatedly when asked.

Question 8. What is the King's opinion about his Councillors? Why did he form that opinion?

Answer: The King saw the parrots say two phrases repeatedly – 'God save the King' and 'Pretty Polly' in seven different Oriental languages and this reminded him about his Councillors who too repeated the same thing differently. This made the King have a low opinion about all his Councillors who blabbered the same thing repeatedly.

Question 9.

- a. The eight Princesses made an offer to Princess September. What was it?
- b. Why, in your view, did they do it?

Answer:

- a. The eight Princesses were jealous of Princess September's singing bird. Hence, they made an offer to buy her a lovely green and yellow parrot by contributing from their pocket-money together.
- b. The other Princesses made this offer to Princess September since they were not happy as everyone praised her singing bird. Their parrots appeared sad and repeated the same phrases over and over again. Out of jealousy, they offered to contribute some money to their younger sister to buy a similar parrot as theirs.

Question 10. What did the sisters advise the Princess to do about her bird?

Answer: The sisters were very jealous of Princess September's singing bird. With an evil intention, they advised her to keep the bird in a cage, otherwise it would fly away forever.

Questions (Page No. 43) (Comprehension Check - II)

Question 1. In the following sentence elaborate the parts given in bold. Under the circumstances it was a very unfortunate remark for the bird to make.

Answer: Under the circumstances – After Princess September's sisters advised her about the singing bird, she was really worried about him. She feared that the little bird might forget her and start liking someone else and that she might lose her little lovely pet.

A very unfortunate remark – When the little bird returned, he said that he would not have come back that night at all as his father-in-law was giving a party and everyone wanted him to stay. However, the bird returned as he felt that the Princess might be worried if he didn't return on time.

Question 2.

- a. What did Princess September do to ensure the safety of her pet?
- b. How did the bird react to it?

Answer:

- a. Princess September put the little bird in a cage to ensure the safety of her pet.
- b. The bird didn't like being trapped in a cage and felt like he was imprisoned. He felt that he lost his freedom and gradually stopped singing and eating.

Question 3. Why did the bird refuse to be taken out in her cage?

Answer: The bird said that he loves nature and he can't stay happy and normal if he was kept in a cage. He would not be able to enjoy the rice-fields, the lake and the willow trees as it would quite look different and dull when seen through the cage bars.

Question 4.

- a. What persuaded Princess September to give the bird his freedom again?
- b. How did the bird react to it?

Answer:

- a. Princess September felt very bad when she saw her little pet lie lifeless inside the cage as he had stopped singing and eating too. This persuaded the Princess to let the little bird enjoy his freedom in the open air, otherwise she feared that he would die in captivity.
- b. The bird was filled with joy and happiness when the Princess freed him from the golden cage. He opened his wings and flew right away into the blue in far lands and promised the Princess that he would return and sing songs for her whenever she wanted.

Question 5. Princess September kept her window open day and night.

- b. How did it help the bird?
- c. How did it help the Princess herself?

Answer: Princess September kept her window open day and night. This helped the little bird to come into her room and leave whenever he wanted.

By keeping the window open day and night, it provided the Princess with fresh wind and natural light. This contributed to her beauty as she was exposed to the beautiful benefits of nature.

Question 6. The eight sisters kept their windows shut. How did it affect them?

Answer: The eight sisters who kept their windows shut grew up to be extremely ugly and disagreeable. They were later married off to the King's Councillors with a pound of tea and a Siamese cat.

Questions (Page No. 44) (Exercise)

Discuss the following questions in small groups. Write their answers later.

Question 1. Are the sisters unkind and cruel? Find evidence in the text to support your idea.

Answer: Yes, the eight sisters of the princess were unkind and cruel. They were jealous when they saw that Princess September's little pet could sing so beautifully, which their parrots couldn't. Therefore, they even offered their pocket-money to their young sister to buy her a green and yellow parrot. They advised her to keep the little bird in a cage so that he could never leave her. Princess September adhered to their advice and kept her little pet in a golden cage. They convinced her to believe that if the bird tried to come out of the cage, she should not allow him and that he would get used to staying inside it. Further, they also told her to be firm even if he died in the cage due to its stubbornness. They even mocked her by saying that she should never set the bird free as he would never return to sing sweet and melodious songs for her.

Question 2. Which, to you, is the most important idea in this story, and why?

- a. importance of music
- b. value of freedom
- c. beauty of nature

Answer:

- b. value of freedom – This is the most important idea of the entire story. It is known to all that freedom is the birth right of every living creature and nobody should be denied of it. Likewise, in the story when the little bird was denied of freedom, he began losing his charm and always remained sad in captivity. He stopped eating and singing too. This indicates that the beauty of life lies in being free and not being in captivity. Hence, in a closed environment, any living creature tends to lose its charm and creativity.

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