

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 1: THE LAST LESSON



THE LAST LESSON

~Summary~

-by Alphonse Daudet

Franz is Reluctant to go to School

Franz started for school very late that morning. His French teacher, M Hamel, had announced that he would question the class on participles. Poor Franz did not know even a single word about them and was afraid of a scolding from his teacher.

It was a bright sunny day and for a moment Franz thought of running away and spending the day outside. The chirping of birds and the marching of the Prussian soldiers was much more tempting than the rules of participles. However, Franz was able to fight the temptation and hurried off to school.

On his way to school, Franz passed the town hall and noticed a crowd in front of the bulletin board. For the past two years, all the bad news had come from it and Franz thought about what the matter was this time. As he was hurrying past, Wachter, the blacksmith, called out to him and said that there was plenty of time to reach the school. Franz thought that he was making fun of him and reached the school panting.

M Hamel's Strange Behaviour

When Franz reached the school, he was very surprised to find that everything was quiet. Usually, when the school began, there would be a great commotion and activity. Franz had often counted on the commotion to get to his desk unnoticed. But, that day everything was as quiet as it was on a Sunday morning. Franz noticed that all of his classmates were already in their seats and M Hamel was walking up and down with his iron ruler under his arm.

He had to open the door and reach his seat in front of everybody. He was blushing and was very frightened. What surprised and confused him more was that, instead of scolding him, M Hamel spoke very kindly to him and told him to take his seat.

Franz Notices Many Unusual Things at School

After Franz had calmed down, he noticed that M Hamel was wearing a special attire, which he wore only on special occasions. The whole school was so strange and a seriousness prevailed in

the atmosphere. But what surprised and confused him most was to see the village people sitting quietly on the back benches. They all looked very sad.

The Order from Berlin

Franz was still wondering as he observed the changes around him, when M Hamel mounted on his chair and made the dreadful announcement. He told the class that it was their last French lesson.

The order had come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine and he would be leaving the school the next day. These words were a shock to little Franz. Now he remembered the gathering at the town hall. Franz was totally shocked by the sudden turn of events. He regretted not having learnt his lessons when there was still time.

Now, he will never be able to learn them. He had wasted his precious time away from the class, engaging himself in useless activities like seeking bird's eggs, going sliding on the Sarr river and so on. His books, which were a nuisance to him, suddenly felt like old friends. His feelings for his teacher too started changing.

The thought that M Hamel was going away and Franz would never see him again, made him forget all about how cranky M Hamel was. Franz was feeling very sorry for him. It was in honour of his 'last lesson' that he had put on his fine clothes, and the village people had gathered there to express their gratitude towards him, and to show their respect for their country and their language.

M Hamel Criticises Himself and the People of Alsace

While Franz was thinking of all this, he heard his name called out; it was his turn to recite. He would have given anything to be just able to say the rule loud and clearly. But unfortunately, he got mixed up on the first words. He was ashamed and stood holding his desk. M Hamel said that he would not scold him. He criticised the people of Alsace for their habit of putting off learning for some time in the future. He blamed their parents for not taking interest in their studies. He also blamed himself for this. Often, he sent the students to water his plants or gave them a holiday when he had wanted to go fishing.

Importance of Mother Tongue

M Hamel then talked about the French language. He called it the most beautiful, the clearest and the most logical language in the world. He wanted the people of France to reassure their language. According to him, whenever the people of a particular nation are enslaved, as long as they are attached to their language, it is as if they have the key to their prison.

The Last Lesson

M Hamel opened a grammar book and taught them their last lesson. Franz was amazed to see how well he understood everything. Franz thought that probably he never paid much attention in the class and that M Hamel had never explained everything with so much patience. After that they had a lesson in writing.

M Hamel had brought new copies for them that day. Everyone was immersed in their work. Even the little children sitting in the class were tracing their fish hooks, as if that was French too.

The Final Good Bye

All this while, M Hamel sat motionless in his chair. Franz thought that M Hamel wanted to imprint this classroom scene in his mind. For 40 years, he had given his faithful service to the school and now his sister was packing their stuff. All this must have been really heart breaking for him. Finally, they had a lesson in history.

Everybody became emotional towards the end; some even started crying, but M Hamel had the courage and patience to hear every lesson to the last. Finally, as the church-clock struck twelve, M Hamel stood up. It was very evident that he had become emotional too. He tried to speak, but choked.

Conclusion of the Last Lesson

The Last Lesson summary reflects on the importance of one's language for any race and why it is crucial to safeguard it.

NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 9)

(Understanding The Text)

Question 1. The people in this story suddenly realise how precious their language is to them. What shows you this? Why does this happen?

Answer: The French districts of Alsace and Lorraine had fallen into Prussian hands, according to the story. As a result, they received an order from Berlin mandating that only German be taught in Alsace and Lorraine schools. It was at that point that they all realized the importance of their language. The usual commotion at school was replaced by the peace of Sunday church. The students' sincerity was evident by the fact that they all began working quietly. The only sound in the room was the scratching of pens across the paper. Even the villagers came in and sat quietly as students in the class. Everyone appeared to be depressed. M. Hamel, who was otherwise disliked, instilled in the students a sense of regret. Franz regretted not paying close attention to him, whereas M. Hamel, who was heartbroken at the prospect of leaving, had never explained everything with such patience. He almost seemed to want to tell them everything he knew before leaving. In his words, he adequately captured the mood. 'We all have a lot of things to be ashamed of.'

Question 2. Franz thinks, "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?" What could this mean?

Answer: Franz's question about whether pigeons can sing in German demonstrates that humans can impose their will on other humans but cannot impose it on nature. It suggests that human power is always limited. They cannot have complete control over the world. Similarly, Prussians can control their schools and learning patterns, but they cannot kill their pride in their country and language.

Questions (Page No. 9)

(Talking About The Text)

Question 1. "When a people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to their prison." Can you think of examples in history where a conquered people had their language taken away from them or had a language imposed on them?

Answer: “When people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to their prison.” Examples of conquered people having their language taken away or having a language imposed on them can be found throughout history.

1. Imposition of English in India during colonization by Britain.
2. Imposition of Chinese in Tibet
3. Arabization in North Africa (imposition of Islam and so, imposition of Muslim languages)
4. Imposition of French in Britain (Francization)
5. Turkish imposed on Kurds

Question 2. What happens to a linguistic minority in a state? How do you think they can keep their language alive? For example:

Punjabis in Bangalore

Tamilians in Mumbai

Kannadigas in Delhi

Gujaratis in Kolkata

Answer: In any state, the linguistic minority is easily identified and faces the same discrimination as religious, social, or ethnic minorities. However, there is a significant disparity between the treatment meted out and the level of acceptance displayed by the majority community in that region. Some cities, such as Delhi and Mumbai, have a cosmopolitan outlook.

The linguistic minority attempts to preserve its identity through intimate contact, interaction, and language preservation in social gatherings, family functions, and regional festivals. Adherence to social customs and traditions in family gatherings and women’s meetings fosters unity among members of the linguistic minority. In a nutshell, they have built a mini-Punjab in Bangalore, a mini-Chennai in Mumbai, a mini-Bangalore in Delhi, and a mini-Surat in Kolkata.

Question 3. Is it possible to carry pride in one’s language too far? Do you know what ‘linguistic chauvinism’ means?

Answer: People often take quite enough pride in their native tongues and repress others. This is incorrect as we should treat all languages and cultures equally.

Linguistic chauvinism refers to a person's excessive pride in their native language. Being overly aggressive and fanatical about one's language is referred to as carrying pride.

Questions (Page No. 9-10) (Working with words)

Question 1. English is a language that contains words from many other languages. This inclusiveness is one of the reasons it is now a world language, For example:

petite – French

kindergarten – German

capital – Latin

democracy – Greek

bazaar – Hindi

Find out the origins of the following words.

tycoon barbecue zero

tulip veranda ski

logo robot trek

bandicoot

Answer:

Tycoon – It originated from the Japanese word “taikun”, which means great lord.

Barbecue – It originated from the Caribbean word “barbacoa”, which refers to a wooden structure used to cook.

Meat – It has Germanic origins.

Zero – The word zero has French origins but it originated from Arabic ‘cipher’.

Tulip – It originated from French but has its origins in Persian dulband means flower shaped turban.

Veranda – It originated from Hindi ‘baranda’ which means railing.

Ski – Norwegian ‘snowshoe’

Logo – It has its origins in Greek logos means ‘imprint’

Robot – It originated from Czech word ‘forced labour’

Trek – South African word means to travel in Dutch

Bandicoot – Telugu word pandikokku, means pig-rat

Question 2. Notice the underlined words in these sentences and tick the option that best explains their meaning.

a. “What a thunderclap these words were to me!”

The words were

- i. loud and clear.
- ii. startling and unexpected.
- iii. pleasant and welcome.

b. “When a people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to their prison”

It is as if they have the key to the prison as long as they

- i. do not lose their language.
- ii. are attached to their language.
- iii. quickly learn the conqueror’s language.

c. Don’t go so fast, you will get to your school in plenty of time.

You will get to your school

- i. very late.
- ii. too early.
- iii. early enough.

d. I never saw him look so tall.

M. Hamel

- i. had grown physically taller
- ii. seemed very confident
- iii. stood on the chair

Answer:

- a.
 - ii. unexpected and quite startling.
- b.
 - ii. are attached to their language.
- c.
 - iii. early enough.
- d.
 - ii. seemed very confident.

Questions (Page No. 10-11) (Noticing Form)

Question 1. Read this sentence

M. Hamel had said that he would question us on participles. In the sentence above, the verb form “had said” in the first part is used to indicate an “earlier past”. The whole story is narrated in the past. M. Hamel’s “saying” happened earlier than the events in this story. This form of the verb is called the past perfect.

Pick out five sentences from the story with this form of the verb and say why this form has been used.

Answer:

Five sentences in the past perfect tense:

1. For the last two years, all our bad news had come from there- the lost battles, the draft, the orders of the commanding officer, I thought to myself. In this sentence, first the information had come and then Franz thought to himself.

2. I had counted on the commotion to get to my desk without being seen.

In this sentence, first he got scared and then he tried to get to the desk without being seen.

3. I had to open the door and go in before everybody.

In this sentence, he had to open the door before getting in.

4. When people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language, it is as if they had key to their prison.

In this sentence, they had their key to prison before they were enslaved.

5. But he had the courage to hear every lesson to the very last.

This tense has been used because in the story, the incidents are happening at two different points of time. In this sentence, he had the courage and so, he listened to the lesson to the end.

Questions (Page No. 11) (Writing)

Question 1. Write a notice for your school bulletin board. Your notice could be an announcement of a forthcoming event, or a requirement to be fulfilled, or a rule to be followed.

Answer:

NOTICE

ABC Public School

Essay Competition

On 05 – 09 – 2017, the school will host an essay competition. “The Qualities I Admire in My Favorite Teacher” is the topic. All interested students should contact the undersigned by September 2, 2017.

Secretary,

School Literary Club,

Your name

Question 2. Write a paragraph of about 100 words arguing for or against having to study three languages at school.

Answer: Write your own answer.

Question 3. Have you ever changed your opinion about someone or something that you had earlier liked or disliked? Narrate what led you to change your mind.

Answer: Do it by yourself.

SHIVOM CLASSES
8696608541