



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH (2026-27)
CLASS – X
QUESTION BANK-THE DEAR DEPARTED

INTRODUCTION OF THE LESSON

The lesson "The Dear Departed" is a satirical play by William Stanley Houghton that critiques the degradation of moral values and the growing materialism within the middle class. Set in the sitting room of a small house, the drama revolves around the Slater and Jordan families as they deal with the supposed death of the grandfather, Abel Merryweather

KEY CHARACTERS

- Mrs. Slater (Amelia): Described as a "vigorous, plump, red-faced, vulgar woman" who is determined to get her own way through straight talking.
- Mrs. Jordan (Elizabeth): Amelia's sister, a stout, complacent woman with an "irritating air of always being right".
- Abel Merryweather: The grandfather, a vigorous man over seventy with "malicious eyes" who eventually exposes his daughters' greed.
- Victoria Slater: Amelia's ten-year-old daughter, who is "precocious" and serves as a contrast to the greedy adults by showing genuine concern for her grandfather.
- Henry Slater and Ben Jordan: The henpecked husbands of the two sisters.

PLOT SUMMARY

- The "Death" and Early Greed: The play begins with Mrs. Slater believing her father has died in his room. Instead of grieving, she immediately focuses on securing his belongings, such as his new carpet slippers, his handsome clock, and his bureau (writing desk), before her sister Elizabeth arrives.
- The Sisters' Rivalry: When the Jordans arrive in their new mourning outfits, the two sisters engage in a "hard bargain" over the grandfather's estate. Their conversation focuses on insurance premiums and the obituary announcement rather than genuine sorrow.
- The Resurrection: The family is "transfixed with amazement" when Victoria announces that Grandpa is getting up. Abel Merryweather descends the stairs, revealing he was simply in a dazed, heavy sleep after a bout of drinking.
- The Final Twist: Abel quickly realizes that his daughters were in a hurry to divide his things after finding them in black mourning clothes and seeing his bureau moved downstairs. In a shocking conclusion, he announces he is altering his will to leave everything to whoever he is living with when he dies and reveals his plan to get married to Mrs. John Shorrocks on Monday.

CORE THEMES AND CONCEPTS

- **Satire on Materialism:** The play mocks how family members can become "low money-grubbing spirits" who value furniture and insurance money over human life.
- **Neglect of the Elderly:** It highlights a societal shift where the elderly are often

viewed as a "burden" to be shifted between relatives.

- **Irony of the Title:** The title is deeply ironic; while "Dear Departed" usually refers to a beloved person who has died, here the "departed" (Abel) is neither truly dead nor "dear" to his daughters for any reason other than his wealth.
- **Poetic Justice:** The ending provides a sense of justice as Abel takes back control of his life and finances, leaving his daughters with nothing.

Short-Answer Questions

1. What is the setting of the play, and what is the initial situation when the curtain rises?

Answer: The play is set in the sitting room of a lower middle-class house in a provincial town, characterized by cheap furniture and a "shabby" chest of drawers. When the curtain rises, Mrs. Slater is laying the table for tea while dressed in "half-mourning," having discovered her father, Abel Merryweather, apparently dead in his bed upstairs.

2. How does Mrs. Slater's treatment of Victoria reflect her priorities regarding her father's supposed death?

Answer: Mrs. Slater is concerned with appearances, harshly telling her daughter to change out of her colorful dress so her aunt and uncle do not find her gallivanting in bright colors while her grandfather is dead. She prioritizes looking more somber and prepared than the Jordans, even ordering Victoria to wear a white frock with a black sash until "new black" mourning clothes are ready.

3. Why does Mrs. Slater insist on moving the bureau from the grandfather's room before the Jordans arrive?

Answer: Mrs. Slater wants to move the bureau because she has always desired it and knows her sister Elizabeth is sharp and will drive a hard bargain for it during the division of property. By moving it downstairs and replacing it with an old chest of drawers before the Jordans arrive, she hopes to trick them into believing the bureau was always her own.

4. Why are Ben and Elizabeth Jordan late to the Slater household after receiving news of Abel's death?

Answer: Elizabeth Jordan explains that she could not possibly start for her sister's house without first securing proper mourning clothes. She considers it a relief to get into the black, highlighting her preoccupation with the formal etiquette of death over the emotional reality of her father's passing.

5. Describe Abel Merryweather's physical appearance and demeanor when he unexpectedly appears on stage.

Answer: Despite being over seventy, Abel is described as vigorous and well-colored with bright, malicious eyes that twinkle under heavy eyebrows. He wears a gay dressing-gown and is initially confused but quickly becomes irritated by his family's tomfoolery and their transparent attempts to claim his belongings.

6. How do the Slaters and Jordans attempt to justify the fact that they are all wearing mourning clothes to Abel?

Answer: When Abel notices the family is in mourning, Mrs. Slater quickly lies and claims

they are grieving for a relative of Ben's. Ben, caught off guard, struggles to invent a name, eventually claiming his brother Isaac died in Australia, despite Abel's suspicious questioning.

7. What specific items of Abel's did the Slaters attempt to misappropriate, and how does Abel discover these actions?

Answer: The Slaters steal Abel's new carpet slippers, his handsome clock, and his handsome bureau. Abel discovers the theft of the slippers because Henry is wearing them, and he notices the clock and bureau in the sitting room, demanding why they were shifted from his bedroom.

8. What three specific actions does Abel Merryweather intend to take on the upcoming Monday?

Answer: Abel intends to visit his lawyer to alter his will, go to the insurance office to pay his overdue premium, and go to St. Philip's Church to get married. He reveals he is marrying Mrs. John Shorrocks, the widow from the "Ring-o'-Bells," who he believes will actually find it a pleasure to look after him.

9. What does Henry mean by the term "poetic license" during the discussion of the newspaper announcement?

Answer: "Poetic license" refers to the freedom a writer has to change facts or normal rules of language in order to maintain a rhyme or create a specific effect. In the play, Henry uses the term "poetic license" to justify the use of incorrect grammar in a verse intended for a newspaper obituary. When Mrs. Jordan objects to the line "the spot that contains you is sacred to we" because it is grammatically wrong, Henry and Mrs. Slater explain that standard rules of language do not always apply in poetry.

10. How does Victoria Slater's attitude toward her grandfather contrast with that of the adults in the play?

Answer: Unlike her mother and aunt, who are preoccupied with "pinching" his belongings and insurance money, Victoria shows genuine affection for her grandfather. She is "precocious" enough to see through her parents' greed and is the only one who expresses sincere happiness when she realizes he is alive.

Essay Questions

1. How is hypocrisy of the two sisters brought out in the play, 'The Dear Departed'? OR Analyze how William Stanley Houghton uses the characters of the Slaters and the Jordans to satirize the materialism and hypocrisy of the British middle class.

In the play *The Dear Departed*, the two sisters, Amelia (Mrs. Slater) and Elizabeth (Mrs. Jordan), are "fake" because they pretend to be heartbroken while actually being incredibly greedy. Mrs. Slater tells everyone her heart is "fit to break" because her father is dead. However, while he is still "lying dead and cold upstairs," she is busy stealing his furniture (the bureau and the clock) so her sister won't get them. She even makes her husband wear her father's slippers just to save money.

Elizabeth (Mrs. Jordan) doesn't even rush to the house when she hears her father died. Instead, she delays her visit just to make sure she has a brand-new black outfit so she can look more "refined" and better than her sister. At first, the sisters praise their father for being "honourable" when they think he paid his insurance. But as soon as they suspect he

didn't pay it, they immediately turn on him, calling him a "drunken old beggar" and saying he didn't pay it "on purpose just to annoy us". For years, the sisters argued about who had to take care of their father, with Elizabeth saying she'd "had enough of him to last a lifetime". But once the father says he will leave all his money to whoever he is living with when he dies, they both start begging him to live with them and acting like they love him. In short, they only "care" about their father when there is something in it for them, which is why Abel Merryweather eventually decides to leave them both with nothing.

2. Compare and contrast Amelia Slater and Elizabeth Jordan. In what ways are they similar in their approach to their father's "death" and his estate?

Answer: Amelia is a "vigorous, plump, vulgar woman" who is direct and aggressive in her greed, such as when she "pinches" the bureau and clock before her sister arrives. Elizabeth is more "complacent" with an "irritating air of always being right" and uses social etiquette to mask her coldness, such as delaying her visit just to ensure she has a "complete and deadly outfit of new mourning". Despite these personality differences, they are identical in their materialism; both see their father only as a source of inheritance and were both "trying to turn him over" to the other for years.

3. Discuss the role of Victoria Slater in the play. How does her "precocious" nature and her interactions with the adults serve as a commentary on the family's lack of genuine grief?

Answer: As a precocious ten-year-old, Victoria serves as the play's moral foil to the greedy adults. She is the only character who shows genuine emotion, being the only one truly "glad" that her grandfather is not dead. Her innocent but sharp observations—like asking if her parents are "pinching" the bureau—highlight the family's dishonesty and lack of real grief, forcing the adults to lie to justify their theft.

4. Explore the theme of elder neglect as presented in the text. How do the children's attitudes toward Abel's insurance and belongings reflect their true feelings toward him?

Answer: The play presents elder neglect as a result of "increasing materialism". The sisters' true feelings are revealed by their focus on Abel's "bits of things" and his insurance money rather than his well-being. Their lack of respect is most obvious when they stop pretending to be sad and call him a "drunken old beggar" and a "swindler" the moment they suspect his insurance premium was not paid.

5. Examine the dramatic structure of the play, specifically the shift in power that occurs when Abel Merryweather "returns to life." How does his final announcement serve as a fitting resolution to the conflict?

Answer: The play's power dynamic shifts completely when Abel "returns to life" and discovers his daughters were already dividing his belongings. This transforms him from a passive victim of his daughters' neglect into a powerful agent of his own life. The resolution is fitting because Abel uses his daughters' greed against them, announcing he will marry Mrs. John Shorrocks and leave his estate to her, even mocking Amelia by saying her theft of the bureau made it "handier to carry across" to his new home at the pub.

6. How do Henry Slater and Ben Jordan demonstrate a total lack of individuality and independent will in the play?

Answer: Henry and Ben are depicted as **passive figures who act as mere puppets** in the hands of their dominant wives, Amelia and Elizabeth. They rarely express their own opinions and, when they do, they are quickly silenced or forced to comply with their wives' greedy schemes. For example, despite Henry's initial hesitation that moving the bureau was not "delicate," he ultimately obeys Amelia's orders to help her "pinch" it before her sister arrives. Furthermore, he submissively wears Abel's new slippers even though they are **"very small" for him**, simply because Amelia does not want them to go to waste. Similarly, Ben Jordan is easily "crushed" by Elizabeth's disapproval and even goes along with a fabricated story about a brother named "Isaac" in Australia just to support the family's lies. Both men lack charisma and individuality, serving only to **validate and execute the instructions** of their wives.

7. What character traits do Amelia Slater and Elizabeth Jordan reveal through their competitive behavior following their father's "death"?

Answer: The two sisters display a shocking level of greed, hypocrisy, and a total lack of genuine affection for their father. Driven by what Amelia calls a "low money-grubbing spirit," they prioritize material gain over mourning, with Amelia even stealing her father's bureau and clock while he is supposedly "lying dead and cold upstairs". They are intensely competitive, focusing more on "outshining" each other with expensive mourning clothes than on their father's passing. Their hypocrisy is most evident when their fake sorrow instantly turns into insults; the moment they suspect Abel failed to pay his insurance premium, they call him a "drunken old beggar" and a "swindler". Ultimately, their traits of materialism and filial ingratitude are exposed when Abel wakes up and realizes that his daughters do not love him, but are only interested in "dividing his things".

8. How does Abel's marriage impact his daughters' inheritance?

Answer: Abel's decision to marry Mrs. John Shorrocks has a devastating impact on his daughters' inheritance, effectively disinheriting them by using their own greed against them. Abel announces that he is destroying his old will to create a new one. In this new version, he plans to leave all his "bits of things" specifically to whomever he is living with at the time of his death. By marrying Mrs. John Shorrocks, the widow who keeps the 'Ring-o-Bells' public house, Abel will move out of his daughters' homes to live with his new wife. Because Abel will no longer be living with Amelia or Elizabeth, they will receive nothing from his estate under the terms of the new will. He even mocks Amelia's attempt to steal his bureau, noting that by moving it downstairs, she actually made it "handier to carry across" to his new home at the 'Ring-o-Bells'. Ultimately, his marriage serves as a "pleasant surprise" that transforms him from a financial prize his daughters were fighting over into an independent man who takes his wealth with him.