



QUESTION BANK – CLASS XII

THE LAST LESSON – Alphonse Daudet

Summary:

The story is narrated by a French boy, Franz. He is lazy but sensitive and likes to play. He dislikes studying French and hates his teacher M. Hamel.

After overpowering their districts of Alsace and Lorraine in France, Berlin has ordered that German language instead of French be taught in the schools there.

It is the last day of their French teacher M. Hamel, who has been there for forty years. He is full of grief, nostalgia and patriotism. As a mark of respect to his hard work, the village men also attend his 'last lesson'. They are sad as they did not learn their mother tongue, French in their childhood.

Franz is shocked to know that it's his last lesson, as he does not know French. Now, suddenly, he gets interested in learning it and understands everything taught on that day!

He develops an instant liking for the teacher, M. Hamel and respects him for his sincerity and hard work. He feels sad at departing from him and is ashamed for not being able to recite the lesson of participles.

M. Hamel tells them that they all are at fault for not being eager enough to learn, putting it off to the next day. He blames himself for not teaching them sincerely.

His patriotism is reflected in his praise for the French language as being the most beautiful and most logical language in the world. He tells the class to guard their language as being close to one's language is the key to escape from the prison of slavery. It will help them in getting free from the Germans.

They realize the importance of learning their mother tongue and that they have been defeated by the Germans because of their illiteracy.

Franz feels that it is not possible to take away one's language from a person as it is natural to each being, may it be the "coo" to the pigeons or "French" to the Frenchmen.

Title Analysis of the Lesson

Procrastination is an evil that corrodes golden opportunities sent in our way as delaying our works is an inherent flaw in our outlook towards life. The story revolves around the last lesson taught by M. Hamel as now French would no longer be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. If we take our life for granted and fail to be grateful for it, chances are that we will lose it in times to come. This is exactly what happened with the people of Alsace and Lorraine. They lost their chance to be close to their mother tongue as they had never bothered to learn their language and it was a matter of shame that being Frenchmen, they were unable to read or write French. Hence the title 'The Last Lesson' is apt as it teaches the people of Alsace and Lorraine and the readers as well that lessons of life must be learnt well in time lest life should take away the opportunity.

Setting of the Lesson

The story is set in a French village in Alsace district of France, with the backdrop of the Franco-Prussian war in which France was defeated by Prussia (then consisting of Germany, Poland and parts of Austria). The Prussian rulers order that French will no longer be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The story tells how M.Hamel, a school teacher in Alsace, his students and the towns people react to this news. There is an atmosphere of hopelessness and regret in the classroom. For the first time the defeated French people in the village realize their mistake in not learning their own language. The setting is appropriate, as the story relates to a bygone era of French defeat in the hands of the Prussians.

Narrative Style

The story 'The Last Lesson' has a first person narrative. The speaker is a little boy named Franz, a resident of Alsace-Lorraine district of France that has been occupied by the Prussians. The tone is serious and biased. The author feels biased about the government and the war compelling everyone to speak German. The oppressors and conquerors become heartless and enforce their own views on the defeated. This is clear from the story when the order from Berlin comes that French will no longer be taught in Alsace and Lorraine.

The author has used many literary devices of irony, metaphors, similes and symbols to make the narration and them clear and effective. He uses irony, to highlight the human tendency that there is a plenty of time to do things. Hence, we keep on postponing the lessons of life, forgetting that life is subject to change. Learning of French by the people has never been a serious affair with them. But the sudden order to stop teaching French comes as a sudden blow and sad realisation to the people. The author has also used other devices like metaphors, similes and symbols. 'What a thunderclap' is a metaphor for the sudden order from Berlin. Mother tongue 'as if a key to their prison' is a simile, the key to regain freedom from their prison.

Theme of the Lesson

The importance of language and its connection with nationalism are the central themes of the chapter "The Last Lesson." The protagonist of the narrative is a little kid, Franz, whose teacher, M Hamel is compelled to flee his native town in France's Alsace region because German settlers are annexing it and making German its official language. Now the mother tongue, French will not longer be taught in the schools of Frech districts of Alsace and Lorraine. Even though it is obvious that his students won't be able to speak French in the future, the narrator's French teacher, Monsieur Hamel, is determined to give them one more lesson in the language. The teacher emphasizes that language is an integral element of one's identity and culture and that its suppression constitutes an act of oppression, as done by the enemy country. The French villagers reaize that they have been overpowered by the enemy soldiers because they did not value their country and their mother tongue.

'The Last Lesson' very prominently raises the question of linguistic and cultural hegemony of the colonial and imperial powers and their lust for controlling the world and influencing their cultures and identities.

The Last Lesson raises the burning question very innocently through the words of little Franz that "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?" This raises the question of immorality of imposing imperial languages and cultures on the colonies. The child questions that when even the birds and animals can't be forced to abandon their language and speak others, then what forces the man to think that it would be prudent to force other human beings to accept any language other than theirs.

The language of a country is not only a medium of communication for the people but also the link for identity, once the native language is snatched away from the people. It's not only the loss of convenient communicating medium but also the loss of identity for people for what they have been and what they might become.

When a small child like Franz can think of the irrationality behind snatching away the right of language and identity from people then why can't the war lords and colonizers understand the fact?

RTC/ CBQ

1. Assertion- After the class was over, Mr. Hamel could not even speak as his voice choked with emotions.

Reason- Mr. Hamel was old and could not talk at a stretch.

- a. Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A
- b. Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A
- c. A is true but R is false
- d. A is false but R is true

2. Assertion- Mr. Hamel focused on the importance of one's language as the key to one's prison.

Reason- Language helps people bind together despite being enslaved under some other foreign rule.

- a. Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A
- b. Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A
- c. A is true but R is false
- d. A is false but R is true

3. Assertion- Watcher, the blacksmith, taunted Franz that there was enough time before he reached school.

Reason- Watcher had already come to know about the order from Berlin.

- a. Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A
- b. Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A
- c. A is true but R is false
- d. A is false but R is true

4. Assertion- A bulletin-board always serves as the source of bad news during a war.

Reason- All the bad news about the Franco-Prussian War had come from the bulletin-board in Alsace.

- a. Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A
- b. Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A
- c. A is true but R is false
- d. A is false but R is true

Solved Answers: (Short answer questions – 2 marks)

1.What changes were noticed by Franz in his French teacher while teaching his last lesson?

Ans. M.Hamel – a perfect and ideal teacher. His tone becomes gentle and polite. As a true patriot-calls upon the people to shake off their habit of procrastinating to safeguard their language- the most beautiful language in the world.

2. How did Franz’s feelings about M.Hamel and school change?

Ans. Order from Berlin-that only German would be taught in schools-aroused a sense of patriotism in Franz quite suddenly he developed a strange fascination for his school and the French language- his books which were earlier a burden to him were ‘old friends now’- also developed a certain respect for M.Hamel- the fact that he would not teach them any more, made Franz forget how cranky he was.

3. What is the significance of the last lesson?

Ans. The last lesson was to be delivered by the French teacher, M.Hamel, to his students. From the next day, learning the German language would be imposed on the people speaking French. The teacher stressed upon the importance of the French language which he calls the most beautiful language in the world. He tells the class to guard their language among themselves and never forget it.

4. Why was Franz tempted to play truant from school?

Ans. The French teacher M Hamel was going to ask questions on participles which Franz had not prepared. To avoid being scolded he was tempted to play truant from school and spend the day out doors in a pleasurable manner.

5. What was unusual about the school that Franz noticed when he entered the school?

Ans. As Franz entered in school he noticed the unusual silence as if it was a Sunday morning. No noise of lesson chanting, no noise of opening and closing of desk drawers. All students were already in class. Teacher was wearing the special fancy dress which he would usually wear only on special occasions like prize ceremonies etc. The back benches were occupied by the villagers

6. Why was it the last lesson? How did Franz react to it?

Ans. As the order from Berlin had come to teach German in all schools of Alsace and Lorraine there would be no French lesson from the next day M Hamel announced in the class. The announcement was like a thunderclap to Franz. He felt sorry for not learning French. The French books, which earlier were a nuisance, became attractive. He felt he could not give up his French books.

7. What reasons did M Hamel give for their lack of interest in learning French?

Ans. The lack of interest in learning French was due to the parents who wanted their children to work in the farm or mill to earn; due to the students who were reluctant to learn and often put off the lesson for the next day and due to himself as he asked them to water the flowers and gave them off when he had to go for fishing.

8. Why does M Hamel not want the people to forget French?

Ans. M Hamel did not want them to forget French as it is the most beautiful and logical language and as long as they held fast to their language it would be as if they had the key to the prison.

9. Describe how M Hamel conducted the last lesson.

Ans. In his last French class though M Hamel was emotional he fully involved himself in the teaching learning process. He heard every lesson to the last, sitting motionless in the chair. When the church bell struck twelve he stood up pale and wrote 'Vive La French' and with a gesture he communicated that the school was dismissed.

10. Describe the impact of the notice on Franz, M. Hamel and the senior villagers?

Ans. The notice affected everybody deeply. Franz thought why he had wasted his time on leisure activities instead of learning his own language. The books which would seem to him as a burden now seemed to be

old friends to him. H. Hamel was feeling guilty for sending his students for his personal tasks. Villagers were feeling guilty for not having sent their children to school.

11. Why were some elderly persons occupying the back benches that day?

Ans: The order had come from Berlin to stop teaching French in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine and for German to be taught instead. In the last French lesson, the elderly were seen occupying the last benches as a mark of respect for M.Hamel who had taught there for forty years. They sat there as they wished to have gone to school more regularly. They also wanted to pay tribute to their country and mother tongue. (CBSE 2018)

Long answer questions – 5 marks each

11. Write a brief character sketch of M. Hamel.

Ans. M. Hamel was taken as a strict teacher. Students were afraid of his iron ruler. He was a very sincere and dedicated teacher who served for forty long years in his service as a teacher to the village in Alsace. When he got the notice to vacate his place to make space for the new German teacher, he was totally broken. He remained sad and nostalgic during his final class as he loved his country very much. This changed his behavior; he behaved rather very politely and patiently. When Franz was not able to say his lesson correctly, instead of scolding him he just made him understand the relevance of learning the mother tongue. He preached to everyone present in the class that important things should never be postponed. He regretted the fact that learning of French was never given any importance

12. Franz thinks, “Will they make them sing in German , even the pigeons?”. Comment.

Ans. The Last Lesson is set in the days of the Franco-Prussian War. It depicts how , after defeating France in the War, the Prussians wanted to take over not only the French territory but also rule over the minds of the people of France. So an order received from Berlin declared that the French language was no longer to be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine and was to be replaced by the German language. This news came as a shock to the French people. Franz , too, felt extremely sad at being deprived of learning his own language. He wondered at such tyranny where man tried to enslave the minds of other men after capturing their territories. During his last French lesson , when Franz hears the pigeons cooing, he wonders if they too would be forced by the Prussians to sing in German. He fails to see any reason for man’s domination over man where, if given a choice, man would not hesitate to master his control even over the forces of nature and its beings.

13. What do you think is the theme of the story ‘The Last Lesson’? What is the reason behind its universal appeal?

Ans. The lesson highlights the human tendency to postpone the learning of things because one feels there is plenty of time to do so. One does not realize that each day brings with it changing circumstances that change life for better or for worse. The writer also asks the reader to value time, freedom and peace. One never knows what a new dawn would bring with it that might end our hopes and aspirations. Through the narrator, the author urges the reader to respect his country, its people, its culture and specially its language for 'it has the key to their freedom.

The people of Alsace always thought they had plenty of time to learn their lessons; therefore, they did not give much importance to school. They preferred their children to work on the farms and mills instead of having them learn the lessons. Even Franz always looked for opportunities to skip school and collect birds eggs. However, the unexpected happens and an order is received from Berlin regarding compulsory teaching of German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. It is then that they realize that they would be deprived of what they had been evading all this while. The story is aptly titled as it evokes the consciousness in the reader not to put off things and do what one can do that day.

14. The story 'The Last Lesson' is all about 'linguistic chauvinism'. Comment.

Ans. Man was born free but he has bound himself everywhere in chains – the chains of communism, regionalism, nationalities and even linguistic confinements. War and battles for acquiring power became a part of his nature. His desire to rule and become the lord of the world, made him selfish and self-centred. The story 'The Last Lesson' is all about linguistic chauvinism. Acquisition of power over the Alsacians made the Prussians so domineering that they imposed even their language on them. Their pride in their language was so fixed that there was no scope of respecting and accepting the language of others. Their rulers wanted to dominate even their minds and hearts and wanted them to even think in their language, thereby causing the loss of their identity. The story thus highlights linguistic chauvinism which is becoming a major cause of wars and political disturbance in the world.

15. 'When a people are enslaved , as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to the prison'. Explain.

Ans. Political enslavement is a curse for any nation as it deprives it of its identity. The natives of the country do not enjoy any kind of freedom, physical or mental. The ruling government dictates its own terms and compels them to abide by these rules. The enslaved natives become victims of a confined life with no hope of ever being free in their motherland. At such times of enslavement, it is their language which keeps their identity alive. It unites them against the foreigners who have invaded their motherland.

Their language is the key to their prison as it binds them together. It constantly reminds them of their enslavement and thus urges them to fight for the liberation of their motherland. Here M.Hamel reminds his countrymen to safeguard their language after they've received orders from Berlin. He knew that his countrymen could liberate themselves only if they recognized and maintained their identity through their mother tongue. Thus even though it was their last lesson, M.Hamel wanted them to be proud of the beautiful French language.

16. What did the French teacher tell his students in his last French lesson? What impact did it have on them? Why?

Answer:

M. Hamel told his students that a new order from Berlin has declared that all schools of Alsace and Lorraine would teach only German so this was going to be their last French lesson. This new order aroused patriotic feelings in him and he, in turn, wanted to arouse similar patriotism in his students and the village elders. He made them conscious of the glory and value of the French language and told them to safeguard it among themselves and keep it alive at all costs as it was the key to their unity and liberation. Everyone listened to him sadly but with rapt attention and respect. Even little Franz listened to his teacher's words with a new-found interest. He felt sorry that he had neglected learning French. Everyone from the village assembled in the class to thank Mr. Hamel for his forty years of faithful service to the community.

17. How different from usual was the atmosphere at school on the day of the last lesson?

Answer:

Acquiring power over the Alsacians made the Prussians so dominating that they even imposed their language on them. This way the Prussians intended to dominate the hearts and minds of the Alsacians and wanted them to even think in their language and thereby lose their complete identity. An order had been received from Berlin that only German would be taught in schools of Alsace and Lorraine. So there was something unusual about the school on the last day of the French lesson. The usual hustle and bustle was missing. Everything was 'strange and solemn' as on a Sunday morning. The village elders were seated on the back desks.

M. Hamel, who had been teaching French at the school for the last forty years, was wearing his formal suit in honour of the last French lesson. While delivering the last lesson, he called upon his students and the village elders to guard the French language among themselves and never forget it, declaring French to be the most beautiful language in the world. Franz developed a sudden fascination for school and the French language and a sudden respect for M. Hamel. He wanted his teacher to stay and felt very guilty for having neglected his French lessons as now he was being deprived of the opportunity of learning his language.

18. Everybody during the last lesson is filled with regret. Comment.

Answer:

The one common feeling that fills each and every person who is present in the last French lesson is an acute sense of regret. M. Hamel reproaches himself for putting off his students' learning till the next day and sending them to water his flowers instead of learning their lessons. He also gave his students a holiday when he wanted to go fishing. Franz felt sorry for not learning his lessons and escaping school. He wished he had attended his classes more often and even the thought of losing his teacher saddened him. The village elders occupied the back benches of the class to atone for their guilt and express their regret for not having attended school regularly. They were now showing their respect for the country that was theirs no more.

19. 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, French?

Answer:

The feeling of regretfulness for having neglected their native language, French comes quite late to M. Hamel and the village elders. They realise rather late that their language is part of their culture and they should be proud of it. It is only after they have been deprived of learning their language that they understand its value. The imposition of German language made them suddenly realise the authority of their captors and they felt a loss of freedom. So on the day of the last French lesson the village elders are seated on the back desks and M. Hamel, who had been teaching French at the school for the last forty years, was wearing his formal suit as a mark of respect for the last French lesson. M. Hamel expressed how they all had a great deal to reproach themselves for as most of the people of Alsace could neither speak nor write French. Parents preferred to put their children to work on farms or mills

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