

THE LAST LESSON

Q. What impression of M. Hamel's character do you form after reading the story "The Last Lesson"?

A. M. Hamel had been the teacher for French language in the school of Alsace for forty years. Initially, he comes as a careless, undutiful and undedicated teacher who did not encourage his pupil/students for study. He admits it and holds himself responsible for the poor study level of students. Instead of taking the class, he asked them to water the flower bushes/plants and when he wanted to go for fishing, he simply gave them a holiday. He even resorted to corporal/physical punishment and students had a fear of his terrible ruler.

But on the last day, he was looking more dedicated and honest in his approach. He was more polite and kind towards the students. The way he explained everything with so much patience, it seems that he wanted to put everything in their heads before going away. He told them the significance of mother language and appealed them to protect it at every cost as it could be the key to their prison. Even the senior citizens of the village were there to respect the teacher for his forty years of service.

he was a little nostalgic to see the school and surroundings where he had spent the best part of his life. It was evident when he breaks down at the end of the story and could not say even the parting words.

Q. "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." What is the significance of this line?

A. M. Hamel said "When a people are enslaved, as long as/if they hold fast to their language, it is as if they have the key to their prison." The golden line has a great significance to the people of every country. We know that it is the language that keeps the people of a country united and integrated. But at the same time, we must not forget that the difference of languages divides the nations. The Indian states were also formed/carved on the basis of language. Most of the European countries like England, Spain, France and Germany identify themselves on the basis of language.

However, it was very unfortunate for the people of Alsace and Lorraine that they didn't know their mother tongue. The senior citizens of the village also came to attend the class to show respect for the mother language French and teacher M. Hamel for his forty years of service. They all were in a great regret as they had not gone to school in the past. Perhaps this change came when they received the order that only German would be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. Now they all were compelled to learn an alien language enforced on them. It was very sure that if they learnt German, they would cut apart from the root of their own tradition and lose their true identity.

Q: Justify the title of the story 'The Last Lesson'.

A: I agree that the title of the story 'The Last Lesson' suits the story most. The whole story revolves round this 'Last Lesson' when all the changes take place like the unusual quietness of the school, presence of the senior citizens and M. Hamel in his special Sunday clothes. After receiving the order of teaching only German from the next day, every villager observes a great change in him. Franz has not learnt the rules of participles and feels embarrassment later on. On the other hand, the senior citizens of the village realize the importance of mother language in a citizen's life and they are presented in the class to respect and honour the teacher, M. Hamel' and the motherland France that were theirs no more. In the same manner the teacher is very kind, honest and sincere in his effort to teach them. He makes them realize the importance of their mother tongue saying that it is the key of their prison. He wants to teach them everything in this last lesson. He explains everything with patience that students as well citizens were very attentive. All this make the last lesson an unforgettable experience for M. Hamel and villagers.

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1.

Q: Why was Franz reluctant to go to school that day?

Q: Why was Franz afraid to go to the school that particular day?

A: There were two reasons for Franz to be a little afraid and reluctant to school that day. First the school teacher M. Hamel had said that he would ask question on the rules of participle but he had not learnt a single word about them. Secondly, the boy was rather more interested in the outdoor activities like collecting bird's egg and playing on the Saar.

Q: What temptation was Franz able to overcome and finally proceed to the school?

A: On that day the weather was bright and warm. Franz saw the Prussian Soldiers drilling behind the saw mill and heard birds chirping in the forest. All this was much more tempting than going to school. But finally, he resisted all and hurried off to the school.

Q: What is the significance of the bulleting board? Why was there a crowd in front of it?

A: The bulletin board had a great significance for the people of Alsace and Lorraine. It served/provided them all the news associated/related to war, drought and order of the commanding officer. The latest news was that an order had come from Berlin to teach only German language in the school of Alsace and Lorraine.

Q: Why did M. Hamel say 'we've all a great deal of reproach ourselves with?'

A: In his last lesson as a French language teacher, M. Hamel rightly said that 'we've all a great deal of reproach ourselves with.' Here, he gives a simple message that it was Alsace and its people who were to blame themselves for their failure for not learning their mother language. The parents were more anxious about sending their children to a farm house or to a mill to get some more money. He blames himself too for he asked the students to water the flower bushes or simply send them on a holiday when he wanted to go for fishing. Franz could not recite the rules of participle as he was more interested in outdoor activities.

Q: How and why was the teacher dressed differently that day?

Q: Why had M. Hamel put on his fine Sunday clothes that day?

A: The order from Berlin made it mandatory / compulsory for all the schools of Alsace and Lorraine to teach only German language. So, it was the last day of M. Hamel in the school that's why he had put on his special Sunday clothes like green coat, frilled shirt and three-cornered embroidered hat. He usually wore this dress only on inspection day or prize day.

Q: What was the unusual scene in the school that day when Franz reached there?

A: Usually there was a great bustle that could be heard outside the school. But that day the school was looking very quiet and still like a Sunday morning. Franz saw the classmates sitting at their places and M. Hamel walking up and down with his terrible ruler under his arm.

Q: What was the order from Berlin? How was it going to affect learning of Franz?

A: The order from Berlin made it mandatory / necessary for all the schools of Alsace and Lorraine to teach only the German language. It was a welcome news for Franz as the boy was not interested in school and study. He thought that now he would not have to go to school anymore. He was free to collect bird's egg and play on the Saar.

Q. Why were the old men of the village presented/sitting in the class that day?

A. The Senior citizen like old Hauser, the former post master and Mayor were presented in the class that day. They wanted to thank M. Hamel for his forty years of faithful service. They also wanted to show their love and regard for their motherland France which was theirs no more. They were sorry they had not taken the class in past.

Q. How does the teacher hold the parents responsible for the children not studying?

A. M. Hamel holds the parents responsible for the children not studying. He says that instead of sending them to school, they are more anxious to send them to a farm or a mill to make some more money and support the family. This tendency hit the study of children.

Q. What blame does M. Hamel take upon himself for the poor performance level of the children?

A. M. Hamel blames himself for the children for the negligence of study in school. He recalls how he sent them for a holiday when he wanted to go for fishing. Sometimes he made them water the flower bushes instead of taking class. This tendency hit the study of the students.

Q: How does M. Hamel appreciate their mother language? Why?

A: M. Hamel appreciates the mother language French saying that it is the most beautiful, clearest and logical language of the world. They must respect it as it was their true identity. He encourages them to learn and protect it among themselves as it could become the key to their prison.

Q. What did M. Hamel write on the board and what was the significance of it?

A: M. Hamel wrote 'Viva-la-France' which means 'Long live France'. It shows his deep attachment to his motherland and its people. The French teacher is deeply pained as it is his last class in the school. He will no more be teaching in the school.