

NCERT Solutions for Class 11

English

Chapter -1 The Portrait of a Lady

Question:

Notice these expressions in the text. Infer their meaning from the context:

i) The thought was almost revolting

Ans: Grandmother's image in the author's mind has always been of an old lady, with wrinkles that ran across her face. The thought that she was once young, pretty, and played was hard to believe for the author as it contradicted the image he had in his mind.

ii) An expanse of pure white serenity

Ans: Grandmother had a calm, peaceful and serene character. The author compared her to a peaceful winter landscape in the mountains. Her silver locks over her pale, puckered face and a white spotless saree made her appear like a snow-covered mountain.

iii) A turning-point

Ans: It refers to the point in the author's life where his relationship with his grandmother changed drastically. In the plot, it happened after they shifted to the city-house when his parents were comfortably settled there. The author started going to an English medium school and was picked up by a motor bus, breaking the time of togetherness the author and grandmother had.

iv) Accepted her seclusion with resignation

Ans: After shifting to the city and being separated from her village life as well as her grandson, grandmother had to figure out how to spend her time alone. Instead of creating a fuss about it, grandmother accepted the seclusion and involved herself in the activities that interested her.

v) A veritable bedlam of chirrupings

Ans: Grandmother was most happy and satisfied when she spent her time with the sparrows. The sparrows too enjoyed her company and filled the veranda with their chirping almost creating chaos.

vi) Frivolous rebukes

Ans: It referred to the casual and light-hearted scolding by grandmother to the sparrows. She did that often while feeding them and spending half an hour of the day with them.

vii) The sagging skins of the dilapidated drum

Ans: The phrase points to the fact that the drum was old and well used which led to its skin being saggy. It was disintegrating and would have been in the storage for years until the day grandmother took it out to sing songs of the homecoming of warriors.

Questions

1. Mention the three phases of the author's relationship with his grandmother before he left the country to study abroad.

Ans: The story traced three phases of the author and grandmother's friendship. The primary phase was the happiest time and it was when the relationship between author and grandmother blossomed. Author and grandmother were constantly together in the village. Grandmother raised him during the initial years of his life when his parents were busy settling their lives in the city. She used to wake him up and get him ready and accompany him to school. It is in the second phase when their friendship saw a steep turn. Author and grandmother shifted to the city, and he went to an English medium school, in a motor bus. Grandmother could no longer accompany him to the school and hence they grew apart. During the third phase, they lost all the common ties. The author was given a room of his own in the university and soon moved abroad for five years, leaving grandmother behind and alone. Even though they still loved each other, their communication became nil.

2. Mention three reasons why the author's grandmother was disturbed when he started going to the city school.

Ans: After the author's parents were comfortably settled in the city, the author and grandmother shifted with them, leaving the village life behind. This also marked the gradual disintegration of their friendship. They started seeing each other for less time as the author went to an English medium school and in a motor bus. Hence grandmother could not accompany him to the school or help him in learning the lessons. She was disturbed by the education that was provided to them. She could not understand the implications of reading about laws of gravity or Archimedes' principles without teaching kids about God and holding scripture. She also did not like the idea of the author showing interest and involvement in the subject of music because according to her

music was meant for harlots and beggars. But she never showed her disapproval towards these things but remained silent.

Questions

1. Mention three ways in which the author's grandmother spent her days after he grew up.

Ans: When the author was a child, grandmother's entire day revolved around him. From walking up to accompany him to school, the author and grandmother spent their entire day together. After the author grew up and they shifted to the city, their lives grew apart. He became busy with his work and studies, so eventually, grandmother accepted her seclusion. She started spending the majority of her time by the spinning wheel, reciting her prayers. In the afternoon she relaxed for a while on the veranda feeding the sparrows with breadcrumbs. It was the happiest half an hour of the day for her.

2. Mention the odd way in which the author's grandmother behaved just before she died.

Ans: When the author went abroad for five years for his studies, he felt that it was the last time he would see his grandmother. But he was wrong. He met his grandmother after five years, at the railway station, looking not even a day older, still reciting her prayers. It was in the evening a change came over her. She stopped praying and collected the women of the neighborhood and got a dilapidated drum. She thumped it and sang of the homecoming of warriors, overstraining herself. She caught fever the next day and refrained from resting or going to the doctor and declared that her end was near and she would spend the time meditating and praying. She survived for the day but the next morning she passed away. The way she strained herself on the last day of her grandson's arrival made it appear like she was waiting for him to return before leaving for the journey of the afterlife.

3. Mention the way in which the sparrows expressed their sorrow when the author's grandmother died.

Ans: The sparrows and the grandmother had an intimate relationship. When grandma passed away all the sparrows visited as usual but seeing her dead they just scattered on the veranda floor. They did not chirrup like they usually did. The author's mother felt bad for them and threw some pieces of bread but they took no notice of them. When they carried grandmother's corpse off, they flew away quietly. The next day the breadcrumbs were swept away by the sweeper into the bin.

Questions

1. The author's grandmother was a religious person. What are the different ways in which we come to know this?

Ans: Grandmother was a lady who upheld her religious beliefs and had a kind heart. Her lips always moved to recite an inaudible prayer and her other hand told the beads of her rosary. She rose up early morning and did her morning prayers religiously, every day. Every day, she went along with the author to his school and while the narrator studied, she sat in the temple attached to the school and read scriptures there. It was not only her habits, but her aura was peaceful and calming too like a snow-covered mountain. Before dying, she stopped talking to her family members and turned to prayers and telling the beads.

2. Describe the changing relationship between the author and his grandmother. Did their feelings for each other change?

Ans: The prevalent circumstances did bring a stain on the relationship between the author and his grandmother. The author and his grandmother lived as friends in the village. She raised, loved, and cared for him in the initial years of his childhood. Their relationship saw a turning point when they had to shift to the city to live with the author's parents. The author got admission in an English school, like all other kids. This decreased the time of contact they had together and hence created a gap in their communication.

She remained confined in the home as she could not go with him to the school. Since grandmother wasn't well versed in English she could not help the author with her studies. She also didn't like the subjects that were taught in the school but just remained silent instead of showing her disapproval. She didn't approve of the fact that kids weren't taught scriptures in school and were taught dancing and singing.

When the narrator grew up, he went up to university. He was given his own room. The only common link they had of their friendship also snapped. Later he went abroad for his further studies

No, their feelings for each other did not change even though distance grew between them. They still harbored love, appreciation, and care for each other though they did not communicate it that often.

3. Would you agree that the author's grandmother was a person strong in character? If yes, give instances that show this.

Ans: Yes, the author's grandmother was a person who had a strong character. She was an image of contentment but had firm convictions about certain

things in her life. She had her own ideology regarding the teachings at school. She considered the teaching of scriptures more necessary than that of science and music. When she was secluded, she took to wheel-spinning and feeding sparrows to spend her day. She maintained her composure. She also did not show any discontent when the author decided to go abroad for his further studies, a decision which would have made her sad. She followed her heart and ignored everyone who tried to stop her while she sang for several hours celebrating the homecoming of her grandson. During the last few hours of her life, she ignored the protests of her family members and instead took to reciting prayers and telling her beads of the rosary because she wanted to remember God before breathing her last. She decided her priorities and concentrated on topics that were of her interest to.

4. Have you known someone like the author's grandmother? Do you feel the same sense of loss with regard to someone whom you have loved and lost?

Ans: Yes, I knew someone like the author's grandmother. My grandmother passed away recently and she held a close space in my heart and life. The intense sense of loss is very heart-wrenching as I spent fifteen years of my life with her. She was a source of constant support and strength for me and parting away from her was difficult.

OR

No, I have never known anyone the way the author knew his grandmother. I am an introvert and like to spend most of the time with myself and do not often engage with people. Thus, I have never felt the same sense of grief as presented in the story.

Thinking about the Language

1. Which language do you think the author and his grandmother used while talking to each other?

Ans: The author and his grandmother would have used their mother tongue to converse with each other. It is a common sight in Asian cultures. The author, Khushwant Singh, belonged to Punjab. Local and elderly there are well versed in Punjabi, their native language.

2. Which language do you use to talk to elderly relatives in your family?

Ans: I generally talk with my elders and relatives in my mother tongue (Could be English, Hindi, Telugu, Bhojpuri, etc.)

3. How would you say 'a dilapidated drum' in your language?

Ans: The answer could vary with your mother tongue. In my mother tongue, i.e., Hindi, it is “phata-hua dholak.”

4. Notice the following uses of the word ‘tell’ in the text.

Ans:

- i) At her age one could never tell.
- ii) I would tell her English words and little things about Western science and learning.
- iii) Her fingers were busy telling the beads of her rosary.
- iv) She told us that her end was near.

5. Given below are four different senses of the word ‘tell.’ Match the meanings to the uses listed above.

i) make something known to someone in spoken or written words

Ans: I would tell her English words and trivial things of western science and learning.

ii) count while reciting

Ans: Her fingers were busy telling the beads of her rosary.

iii) be sure

Ans: At her age, one could never tell.

iv) give information to somebody

Ans: She told us that her end was near.

Questions

1. Notice the different senses of the word ‘take.’

Locate these phrases in the text and notice the way they are used.

i) to take to something: to begin to do something as a habit

Ans: “... she took to feeding sparrows in the courtyard of our city house.”

This phrase tells us about Grandmother’s engagement with the sparrows after they shifted to the city and the author started going to an English medium school.

ii) to take ill: to suddenly become ill

Ans: “The next morning, she was taken ill.”

This phrase refers to the sudden illness grandmother swept into after the evening she celebrated the return of her grandchild, overstraining herself.

2. The word 'hobble' means to walk with difficulty because the legs and feet are in bad condition. Tick the words in the box below that also refer to a manner of walking.

Haggle Shuffle Stride Ride Waddle
Wriggle Paddle Swagger Trudge Slog

Ans: The words that also refer to a manner of walking are shuffle, stride, waddle, and trudge. Shuffle means to walk by dragging feet, stride means to take one long step, waddle means to take short clumsy steps, and trudge means to walk slowly with heavy steps.