Prime Pupil

CLASS 12

ENGLISH FL

Summary

Flamingo

Prose & Poetry

Vistas

Supplementary Reader



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Class 12 :: English FL :: Summary

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Flamingo – Prose

Lesson 1: The Last Lesson

The Last Lesson is a story about the love for one's language and country, and the pain of losing the freedom to learn and use one's own language. The story is set in Alsace and Lorraine, which have come under Prussian control. An order has been issued that only German will be taught in the schools, making the lesson described in the story the last French lesson.

Franz, a young schoolboy, is late for school and is afraid because he has not prepared the rules of participles that M. Hamel had asked him to learn. On his way, he notices that the day seems unusually pleasant, but he is tempted to stay outdoors rather than go to school. He also sees a crowd in front of the bulletin board at the town hall. For the last two years, all the bad news and unpleasant announcements have appeared there.

When Franz reaches the school, he is surprised by the unusual silence. Instead of the normal noise and commotion, the classroom is quiet and serious. M. Hamel is dressed in his special clothes, which he usually wears only on important occasions. More surprisingly, several villagers are sitting at the back of the classroom. Franz soon learns the reason for this unusual atmosphere. M. Hamel announces that an order from Berlin has arrived stating that German will be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine from the next day. Therefore, this is their last French lesson.

Franz is deeply shocked. He suddenly realizes how much he has taken his language and education for granted. The books that had seemed boring now appear precious to him, and he regrets not having learned his lessons properly. He also understands why M. Hamel is sad. M. Hamel has taught in the school for forty years and must now leave because of the new order.

The lesson begins with grammar, followed by writing and history. Franz is surprised to find that he understands everything easily. M. Hamel explains that people often postpone learning, thinking they will do it later. He also blames the students, their parents and himself for not giving the French language the importance it deserved. The villagers have come to show their respect for M. Hamel and to express their regret for neglecting their education.

During the writing lesson, the words *France, Alsace, France, Alsace* appear repeatedly on the students' notebooks. The atmosphere becomes emotional. Even the pigeons outside seem to represent freedom, making Franz wonder whether the Prussians would force them to sing in German too.

At noon, the church clock strikes twelve and the Prussian soldiers' trumpets are heard. M. Hamel becomes deeply emotional. He tries to speak but cannot continue. He turns towards the blackboard and writes **"Vive La France!"** in large letters. With a gesture, he dismisses the class. The last French lesson has come to an end.

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The story shows that people often realize the value of something only when they are about to lose it. Through Franz, M. Hamel and the villagers, Daudet presents the importance of language, education, freedom and national identity. French becomes more than just a school subject; it becomes a symbol of the people's identity and their attachment to their homeland.

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Lesson 2: Lost Spring

Lost Spring presents the miserable lives of poor children who are forced to give up their childhood and work for survival. Through the stories of **Saheb-e-Alam** and **Mukesh**, the chapter shows how poverty, exploitation, social customs and lack of opportunities destroy the dreams of children.

Saheb-e-Alam

Saheb-e-Alam is a young ragpicker who lives with his family in Seemapuri, on the outskirts of Delhi. His family came from Bangladesh years ago after losing their home and livelihood. Like many other poor families, they live without proper houses, sanitation or basic facilities. Every morning, Saheb searches through garbage for useful things. For him, garbage is a means of survival. Sometimes he finds a coin or something valuable, which gives him hope. The author notices that for children like Saheb, garbage has a different meaning from what it has for wealthy people.

Saheb wants to go to school, but there is no school nearby. The author once tells him that she will start a school for him, and Saheb takes her words seriously. Later, when the author meets him again, he asks about the school. This shows his innocent desire for education. However, his circumstances do not allow him to pursue his dream. Later, Saheb gets a job at a tea stall and earns eight hundred rupees and meals. Although this appears to be an improvement, the author notices that Saheb has lost something important. Earlier, he was free to move around with a bag over his shoulder; now he carries a steel canister and works under someone else's control. His carefree childhood has been replaced by the burden of employment.

Mukesh

The second part focuses on Mukesh, a boy from Firozabad, a town famous for its glass-bangle industry. Most families there have been involved in bangle-making for generations. Children work in dark, unhealthy workshops where they sit near hot furnaces and handle glass. Their eyes are exposed to intense heat and glare, and many workers eventually lose their eyesight. Despite the difficult conditions, the families continue the work because poverty leaves them with very few choices.

Mukesh belongs to a family of bangle-makers but has a different dream. He wants to become a motor mechanic. Unlike many others who have accepted their traditional occupation as their fate, Mukesh wants to break away from it. He is determined to learn to drive a car and become a mechanic. His dream gives the author hope because it shows that even in extreme poverty, a child can imagine a different future.

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The author also describes how the bangle-makers remain trapped in a cycle of poverty and exploitation. They are caught between middlemen, moneylenders, police, bureaucrats and powerful people. They lack education, organisation and awareness of their rights. Their traditional occupation is passed from one generation to another, making it difficult for them to escape. The beauty of the bangles they produce contrasts sharply with the miserable conditions in which they live and work.

Through Saheb and Mukesh, the chapter highlights the loss of childhood, the importance of education and the struggle to break free from poverty and social exploitation. Saheb's lost freedom and Mukesh's determination represent two different responses to poverty. The chapter reminds us that children deserve education, dignity, freedom and the opportunity to dream rather than being forced into labour merely to survive.

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Lesson 3: Deep Water

Deep Water is an autobiographical account of William Douglas's fear of water and his eventual victory over it. The lesson shows how a frightening experience can create a deep psychological fear, but determination, systematic training and courage can help a person overcome it completely.

When Douglas was about three or four years old, he was knocked down by powerful waves at a beach in California. Although he was too young to understand the experience fully, it created an early fear of water. Later, when he was about ten or eleven, he decided to learn swimming at the YMCA pool because he wanted to overcome his fear and enjoy swimming. The pool seemed safe, with a shallow end of about two or three feet and a deep end of about nine feet.

One day, while Douglas was sitting alone beside the pool, a big, strong boy suddenly picked him up and threw him into the deep end. Douglas tried desperately to come to the surface, but he sank repeatedly. He made a plan to save himself. He thought that when his feet touched the bottom, he would jump up, reach the surface, take a breath and swim to the side. However, his plan failed. He sank again and again, becoming increasingly terrified and helpless. Finally, he lost consciousness.

When Douglas regained consciousness, he found himself lying beside the pool. Although he had survived, the experience left a deep and lasting fear in his mind. He avoided swimming in pools, lakes and rivers. The fear affected his enjoyment of life and prevented him from doing things that he wanted to do. He realized that simply avoiding water would not solve the problem.

Years later, Douglas decided to overcome his fear permanently. He hired an experienced swimming instructor who trained him systematically. The instructor first taught him to breathe properly. Then he taught him how to kick his legs, move his arms and coordinate the different movements required for swimming. Douglas practised regularly for several months. Whenever fear returned, he continued the training instead of giving up. Gradually, he became more confident and comfortable in the water.

Even after his formal training was completed, Douglas continued to test himself. He swam alone in different waters, including Lake Wentworth and later the Pacific. At times, he still felt a slight return of the old fear, but he challenged it rather than allowing it to control him. Eventually, he realized that the terror that had haunted him for years had completely disappeared.

Douglas concludes that the real danger was not water itself but the fear of drowning that had taken control of his mind. By facing that fear with determination and persistent effort, he regained his freedom. The experience taught him that fear can destroy a person's enjoyment of life, while courage and perseverance can help overcome even deeply rooted fears. His victory over fear gave him a new sense of confidence and made life more meaningful.

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Lesson 4: The Rattrap

The story presents the life of a poor peddler who sells rattraps and believes that the world is like a giant rattrap. According to him, the world offers people temptations such as money, food, shelter and comfort, and once a person is attracted by them, he gets trapped. His own life changes when he experiences kindness, trust and compassion.

The peddler makes rattraps from wire and sells them for a living. He is poor and often goes hungry. He has no family or permanent home and spends his time travelling from place to place. To entertain himself, he thinks about the world as a rattrap. He considers himself a rat that has been caught in the trap of poverty.

One evening, the peddler is welcomed by an old crofter who lives alone. The crofter gives him food, tobacco and a place to sleep. He also plays cards with him and tells him that he has earned thirty kronor by selling the milk of his cow. The next morning, the crofter leaves for work and the peddler is tempted by the money. He takes the thirty kronor and leaves. To avoid being caught, he enters the forest, but he soon loses his way. He realizes that he himself has been caught in the rattrap of the world.

Eventually, the peddler reaches an ironworks and is allowed to spend the night there. The ironmaster, who owns the ironworks, mistakes him for an old regimental comrade, Captain von Stahle. He invites the peddler to his home. The peddler is afraid that accepting the invitation may expose his theft, so he refuses. However, the ironmaster sends his daughter, Edla, to persuade him. Her kindness and friendly manner make him accept the invitation.

At the ironmaster's house, the peddler is cleaned, given a bath, a haircut and new clothes. The ironmaster soon realizes that the man is not the captain he thought he was and becomes angry. He wants to send him away and even threatens to have him arrested. Edla, however, feels sympathy for the peddler and persuades her father to let him stay for Christmas. She believes that he should be allowed to enjoy at least one peaceful day.

The peddler spends Christmas Eve with the family and is treated with kindness and dignity. Edla gives him food and a Christmas present. Her goodness makes him feel ashamed of his dishonest behaviour. The next morning, after the family attends church, they learn that the peddler has been a thief and has stolen the crofter's money. However, when they return home, they find that he has left the money behind. He has also left a letter for Edla in which he thanks her for her kindness and signs himself as **Captain von Stahle**. He returns the stolen thirty kronor and leaves the rattrap as a Christmas gift for Edla.

The story shows that kindness, respect and trust can bring about a positive change in a person. The peddler, who initially sees the world as a trap, becomes capable of breaking free from his own moral trap because Edla treats him with compassion rather than suspicion. The story suggests that human goodness can awaken goodness in others and give them an opportunity to change.

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Lesson 5: Indigo

Indigo by **Louis Fischer** describes Mahatma Gandhi's struggle for the poor sharecroppers of Champaran and shows how courage, truth and non-violent resistance can help oppressed people gain justice. The lesson also presents Gandhi's practical approach to social reform and his efforts to improve the lives of the peasants.

Rajkumar Shukla, a poor and determined peasant from Champaran, meets Gandhi at the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress. Shukla wants Gandhi to visit Champaran and help the peasants who are being exploited by the British landlords. Although Gandhi is busy, Shukla follows him from place to place until Gandhi finally agrees to visit Champaran.

Gandhi first goes to Patna and then travels to Muzaffarpur to gather information about the condition of the peasants. He meets Professor J. B. Kripalani and other people who provide information about the situation. Gandhi learns that the British landlords force the **sharecroppers** to grow indigo on **15 per cent of their land**. The peasants are required to give the entire indigo harvest to the landlords. When synthetic indigo is developed in Germany, the landlords no longer need natural indigo. They try to release the peasants from the agreement by demanding compensation from them. Some peasants agree to pay because they do not know the actual situation.

Gandhi reaches Champaran and begins investigating the peasants' complaints. The British authorities order him to leave the district. Gandhi refuses to obey the order because he believes that helping the suffering peasants is more important. He is summoned to court. A large crowd of peasants gathers outside the court to support him. The officials become uncertain about how to handle the situation. Gandhi accepts the legal consequences of disobeying the order but refuses to leave Champaran. Eventually, the case against him is dropped. This becomes an important victory for the peasants because they gain confidence and overcome their fear of the British authorities.

Gandhi and his associates investigate the peasants' complaints and collect evidence of their exploitation. The British landlords eventually agree to refund **25 per cent of the money** they had illegally taken from the peasants. Gandhi accepts the settlement even though the amount is not large. For him, the refund is important because the landlords are forced to surrender part of their prestige and the peasants learn that they can resist injustice.

Gandhi does not limit his work to the indigo problem. He and his associates also focus on improving the social and living conditions of the people. Schools are opened, cleanliness is encouraged and medical assistance is provided. Gandhi believes that true freedom requires improvement in people's daily lives as well as freedom from political oppression.

The Champaran episode becomes an example of **satyagraha**, based on truth, courage and non-violence. Gandhi succeeds not through violence or force but through determination, moral courage and the cooperation of ordinary people. The story shows that real leadership means understanding people's problems, standing with them and helping them gain the confidence to fight injustice.

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Lesson 6: Poets and Pancakes

Poets and Pancakes by Asokamitran is a humorous and satirical account of the author's years at Gemini Studios in Madras. The chapter is an extract from his book *My Years with Boss* and presents the people, working atmosphere, hierarchy, ambitions, politics and literary activities of the famous film studio. The title refers to the large quantities of **Pancake**, a brand of make-up material used at the studio, and to the many poets and literary people associated with Gemini Studios.

The make-up department was located upstairs in a building believed to have been Robert Clive's stables. The make-up room had powerful incandescent lights and several large mirrors. The artists used large quantities of Pancake make-up on actors, sometimes creating what the author humorously calls a kind of “fiery misery” for those subjected to it. The department represented a form of “national integration” because people from different regions and communities worked there. At the same time, there was a strict hierarchy. The chief make-up man was followed by his senior assistant, junior assistant and the office boy, who was responsible for the crowd players.

The office boy was a man in his early forties who had joined Gemini Studios with dreams of becoming a great actor, writer, director or lyricist. Instead, he remained responsible for applying make-up to the crowd players. He was disappointed with his career and often expressed his frustration to the narrator. He was also a bit of a poet and believed that he had the ability to write. He blamed Kothamangalam Subbu for his failure and felt that Subbu had somehow prevented him from achieving success. The narrator, however, presents the office boy with a mixture of humour and sympathy.

The author himself worked in a small cubicle with French windows. His job was to cut newspaper clippings on various subjects and preserve them in files. Since others could only see him tearing newspapers, they often thought that he was doing “next to nothing.” In reality, this work made him one of the most well-informed people in Gemini Studios.

The head of Gemini Studios was **S. S. Vasan**, known as the Boss. Vasan was also the editor of the Tamil weekly *Ananda Vikatan*. **Kothamangalam Subbu** was considered the No. 2 person at Gemini Studios. Subbu was extremely talented, cheerful and completely loyal to the Boss. He was particularly useful in the film industry because he could quickly provide creative solutions to problems. If a film scene did not work, he could suggest several alternatives. He was “tailor-made for films” and could produce ideas whenever required.

Subbu was also a poet, novelist and actor. His literary talent included poetry written for ordinary people, and he wrote the well-known novel *Thillana Mohanambal*. He was generous and kind-hearted and often helped people around him. He was closely associated with the Story Department and was almost always seen near the Boss. However, his closeness to the Boss made some people jealous of him. The office boy and others disliked him, although the narrator does not present Subbu simply as a bad person. His position resulted from a combination of talent, loyalty and his close relationship with the Boss.

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The Story Department consisted mainly of poets and writers. Among them were **S. D. S. Yogiar, Sangu Subramanyam, Krishna Sastry and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya**. They usually wore khadi and were part of the literary atmosphere of Gemini Studios. The studio also had a legal adviser attached to the Story Department. The narrator humorously describes the lawyer as "the opposite" of the creative people around him. He was a man of cold logic in a crowd of dreamers and generally wore formal Western clothes.

The legal adviser once caused serious trouble for a talented actress. During an argument with the actress, he secretly recorded her angry speech and later played the recording back to her. The actress was so embarrassed and disturbed by the incident that her promising career came to an end. The lawyer had not necessarily intended to destroy her career, but his cold and logical action had that result. Later, when the Story Department was closed, the legal adviser also lost his job.

Gemini Studios was a favourite place for poets and writers. Its excellent canteen served good coffee, and many members of the studio enjoyed a relaxed life. Most of them wore khadi and admired Mahatma Gandhi. However, they were strongly opposed to **Communism**, which they associated with violence and atheism. The political attitude of the studio becomes important when the **Moral Re-Armament (MRA)** group visits Gemini Studios in 1952.

The MRA was an international group associated with Frank Buchman and was regarded at Gemini Studios as a counter-movement to Communism. Around two hundred people from different countries visited India as part of the group. They were warmly welcomed by the Boss and staged two plays, **Jotham Valley** and **The Forgotten Factor**. Their performances were highly professional and impressed the people of the studio as well as the Tamil drama community. Their elaborate sets and costumes, especially their methods of presenting sunrise and sunset on stage, influenced Tamil theatre for several years.

Another unusual event was the visit of an **English poet, Stephen Spender**. The Boss warmly welcomed him and arranged for him to address the people at Gemini Studios. However, the audience was completely puzzled by the visit. Nobody seemed to know who the poet was, what he was talking about or why he had come to the studio. His English accent made his speech difficult to understand, and the audience remained silent and bewildered. After he left, the mystery of his visit remained unresolved for a long time.

The mystery was eventually solved by the narrator after he had left Gemini Studios. He read an announcement in *The Hindu* about a short-story competition organised by a British periodical called **The Encounter**. Since the magazine was unfamiliar to the Gemini literary community, the narrator went to the British Council Library and found a copy. He discovered that **Stephen Spender was its editor**. Much later, he also came across the book ***The God That Failed***, a collection of essays by six writers who had once been attracted to Communism but later became disillusioned with it. Stephen Spender was one of the contributors. This helped the narrator understand why the Boss and Gemini Studios had been interested in Spender and why his visit had taken place.

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Through these apparently unrelated incidents, Asokamitran presents Gemini Studios as a fascinating world of films, make-up, ambition, jealousy, talent, politics, literature and misunderstandings. His gentle humour and irony reveal both the glamour and the absurdities of the film industry. The chapter also shows how people with very different backgrounds and ambitions lived and worked together in the same institution, while the narrator's observations turn ordinary studio life into an entertaining and memorable account.

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Lesson 7: The Interview

The Interview by Christopher Silvester presents two aspects of the interview as a form of journalism. **Part I** discusses the history, importance and criticism of interviews, while **Part II** contains an interview of the famous Italian scholar and writer **Umberto Eco** by **Mukund Padmanabhan** of *The Hindu*.

The interview has been a common feature of journalism for more than a century. It has become an important means of communication and a way of gaining information about famous and influential people. Some people consider the interview a valuable source of truth and even an art. Others, especially several famous writers and celebrities, dislike interviews because they feel that interviews invade their privacy and diminish their personality.

The writer mentions the strong opposition expressed by several well-known personalities. **V. S. Naipaul** believed that some people are wounded by interviews and lose a part of themselves. **Lewis Carroll** had a strong fear of interviewers and never consented to be interviewed. **Rudyard Kipling** considered the interview immoral and a form of assault, although he himself had interviewed **Mark Twain**. **H. G. Wells** described interviewing as an ordeal, even though he later interviewed **Joseph Stalin**. **Saul Bellow** compared an interview to thumbprints on his windpipe. These opinions show why interviews have sometimes been regarded as an intrusion into private life.

Despite these objections, Silvester points out the importance of interviews. They can provide vivid impressions of contemporary personalities and preserve their ideas and experiences. The interviewer also has considerable power because the questions and answers can influence how the public understands a person. Thus, the interview remains a highly useful medium of communication.

Part II presents Mukund Padmanabhan's interview with **Umberto Eco**, a professor at the University of Bologna who was known for his work in semiotics, literary criticism and medieval aesthetics. Eco was also a successful novelist, particularly after the publication of *The Name of the Rose*. In the interview, Mukund asks him how he manages to accomplish so many different kinds of work.

Eco explains that he does not really see himself as a person doing many unrelated things. His academic work, children's books and novels are connected by his philosophical and intellectual interests. He describes himself primarily as **"a university professor who writes novels on Sundays."** He prefers the academic world and considers his novels an extension of the ideas he explores through his scholarly work.

Eco explains his productivity through the idea of **"interstices."** These are the small empty spaces or gaps in everyday life, such as the time spent waiting for an elevator. Instead of allowing such moments to remain unused, Eco uses them productively for thinking and writing. This helps explain how he manages to produce a large amount of work despite his many academic responsibilities.

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Eco also explains that his academic writing has a personal and narrative quality. Although his subjects are scholarly, he does not write in a completely dry or mechanical manner. His interest in storytelling naturally connects his academic work with his novels. He says that he became a novelist almost by accident, and his fiction continues to explore ideas that are important to him as a scholar.

Mukund asks Eco about the extraordinary success of his novel ***The Name of the Rose***. The novel, set in the medieval world and combining mystery, history, philosophy and intellectual ideas, became an international bestseller. Eco himself is surprised by its enormous success. He suggests that its success cannot be explained with certainty. Timing may have played a role, and he believes that if the novel had appeared at another time, it might not have received the same response. Even Eco considers the success of the novel something of a mystery.

The chapter therefore presents the interview both as a debated journalistic form and as a practical example of how an interview can reveal the personality, ideas and working methods of a famous person. It shows that although interviews may sometimes be intrusive, they can also provide valuable knowledge and create vivid impressions of important contemporary figures.

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Lesson 8: Going Places

Going Places by A. R. Barton is a story about Sophie, a young schoolgirl who dreams of a glamorous and successful life far beyond her modest circumstances. The story explores adolescent fantasising and hero-worship, especially through Sophie's admiration for the young Irish footballer Danny Casey.

Sophie and her friend Jansie are returning from school. Sophie dreams of opening a boutique and becoming successful. She says she could first become a manager and later even an actress or fashion designer. Jansie, however, is practical and reminds Sophie that such ambitions require money. She knows that both of them are likely to work in the biscuit factory after leaving school. Sophie refuses to accept these limitations and continues to dream of a more exciting life.

At home, Sophie feels uncomfortable with the ordinary and restricted life of her family. Her mother is busy in the kitchen, her father is tired from work, and her younger brother Derek is around. Her elder brother Geoff is an apprentice mechanic. Sophie is especially fascinated by Geoff because he is quiet and mysterious. She imagines that he knows about a wider and more interesting world and wishes she could become a part of it.

Sophie then tells Geoff that she has met **Danny Casey**, the young Irish football player whom she admires. She claims that she saw him in the arcade and recognised him while he was looking at some toys. According to Sophie, Casey was looking for something but had no money with him. She says that they talked and that she promised to meet him again the following week. She also tells Geoff that she wanted an autograph for Derek, but neither of them had a pen or paper.

Geoff is doubtful but interested in Sophie's story. When he mentions it to the family, Sophie's father dismisses it as another of her wild stories. Sophie is upset because she wants Geoff to believe her. She also asks him not to tell anyone about the promised meeting with Casey. Sophie particularly wants to keep this part of the story secret.

On Saturday, the family goes to watch their usual football match. United wins **2–0**, and Danny Casey scores the second goal. Sophie watches him from the stands and feels extremely proud and excited. For her, Casey is not merely a footballer but a hero whom she has begun to imagine as part of her own world.

Later, Jansie questions Sophie about meeting Danny Casey. She has heard about the incident through her brother Frank, who learned about it from Geoff. Sophie is annoyed that the story has spread, but she is relieved to discover that Geoff has not told Jansie about the planned meeting. She gives Jansie a less detailed version of the story and continues to hold on to her belief that Casey will meet her.

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The following week, Sophie goes alone to a secluded place near the canal and sits on a bench beneath a solitary elm tree. She waits for Danny Casey to appear. As time passes, however, he does not come. Sophie begins to feel doubt and gradually realises that he is unlikely to arrive. She becomes sad not only because Casey has not come but also because she knows that her family may once again doubt her.

As Sophie walks back, she returns mentally to her fantasy. She imagines Danny Casey once more and relives the excitement of seeing him play football. The story does not directly confirm whether Sophie actually met Casey in the arcade. The ending therefore leaves some ambiguity, but her waiting for him and his failure to appear strongly suggest that the meeting and promised date existed mainly in her imagination.

The story presents the contrast between **dreams and reality**. Sophie longs to escape her ordinary life and creates an exciting world through her imagination. Jansie represents practicality, while Geoff represents the mysterious world Sophie wishes to enter. Danny Casey becomes the focus of her hero-worship and fantasy. Through Sophie's experiences, Barton shows how adolescent imagination can provide excitement and hope, but also disappointment when dreams are confused with reality.

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Flamingo – Poetry

Poem 1: My Mother at Sixty-six

My Mother at Sixty-six by Kamala Das is a deeply personal poem about a daughter's love for her ageing mother and her fear of losing her. The poem presents the natural process of ageing and the pain of separation through a simple journey from the poet's parents' home to the Cochin airport.

The poet is driving from her parents' home to Cochin on a Friday morning, with her mother sitting beside her. While looking at her mother, she notices that she has fallen asleep with her mouth open. Her face appears pale, colourless and lifeless, like that of a corpse. This sight suddenly makes the poet realise with pain that her mother has grown old. The thought of losing her mother becomes frightening and unbearable.

Unable to face this painful thought, the poet quickly looks out of the car window. She sees **young trees** rushing past and **merry children** coming energetically out of their homes. These lively images of youth, movement and happiness contrast sharply with her mother's weak and ageing appearance. The poet tries to distract herself from the thought of old age and death by focusing on the energetic world outside.

When they reach the airport, the poet goes through the security check and then looks at her mother again from a short distance. Her mother appears **wan and pale, like a late winter's moon**. The image of the fading winter moon suggests weakness, old age and the approach of the end of life. At this moment, the poet experiences the same **old familiar ache**, the childhood fear of losing her mother. As a child, she had feared separation from her mother; now, however, the fear is much more serious because old age makes permanent separation a real possibility.

Although she is deeply worried and sad, the poet does not express her pain openly. Instead, she says, **"See you soon, Amma"** and keeps smiling. Her repeated smile hides her anxiety and sadness. The words also express her hope that they will meet again. Thus, the poem ends with an outward expression of courage and reassurance while the poet continues to carry the painful fear of losing her mother within herself.

The poem highlights the **natural process of ageing**, the inevitability of death, the fear of separation, and the deep emotional bond between a mother and daughter. The contrast between the ageing mother and the lively young trees and children makes the passage of time especially powerful. The poem also shows how people sometimes hide their deepest fears and sadness behind a smile when parting from someone they love.

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Poem 2: Keeping Quiet

Keeping Quiet by Pablo Neruda is a thoughtful poem about silence, introspection, peace and universal brotherhood. The poet asks people across the world to pause their hurried activities for a brief moment, remain silent and still, and reflect on their actions. He does not support complete inactivity or death; instead, he wants humanity to take a meaningful pause and understand itself better.

The poet begins by asking everyone to **count to twelve and keep still**. For once, people should not speak in any language and should stop moving their arms so much. The number twelve may suggest the twelve hours of a clock or the twelve months of a year, giving the idea of a complete cycle. The poet imagines this as a rare and unusual moment when people everywhere would experience silence and togetherness. There would be no rush and no engines running, and the world would experience a sudden sense of stillness.

Neruda then imagines how this pause could change human behaviour. **Fishermen would not harm whales** in the cold sea, and the man gathering salt would stop to look at his injured hands. The poet wants people to become aware of the harm caused by their continuous activities and to think about their own suffering as well as the suffering they cause to others and to nature.

He then turns to the problem of war. Those who prepare **"green wars"**, wars involving gas and fire, and wars where victory leaves no survivors, would stop their destructive activities. Instead, they would put on clean clothes and walk peacefully with their brothers in the shade. The poet therefore imagines a world in which enemies stop fighting and experience the possibility of peace, brotherhood and mutual understanding.

However, the poet makes it clear that **keeping quiet does not mean total inactivity or death**. He says that "life is what it is about" and that he wants no association with death. His idea is only to interrupt the endless rush and harmful activities of human beings. A temporary pause would give people an opportunity to think about what they are doing, understand themselves and recognise the consequences of their actions.

The poet refers to the **sadness of never understanding ourselves** and of constantly threatening ourselves with death. Human beings are so busy with their ambitions, competition, violence and destructive activities that they rarely stop to examine their lives. A moment of silence could help them discover a better way of living. It could also create greater understanding among people and reduce violence and destruction.

Finally, Neruda turns to **Nature for a lesson**. The Earth appears still and lifeless at certain times, yet life continues beneath that apparent stillness and later emerges again. In the same way, human beings can use silence and stillness as a period of renewal. After this brief pause, they can return to life with greater awareness and a more positive attitude.

The poem ends with the poet repeating the idea of counting to twelve and keeping quiet. He does not ask humanity to stop living; he asks it to **pause, reflect, understand and begin again**. The central message of the poem is that a brief period of silence and introspection can lead to peace, self-understanding, universal brotherhood and a more harmonious relationship with nature.

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Poem 3: A Thing of Beauty

A Thing of Beauty by John Keats is a poem about the lasting joy and comfort provided by beautiful things. Keats believes that beauty is a permanent source of happiness. It never loses its charm and continues to give peace and hope to human beings even when life is filled with sadness, disappointment and suffering.

The poet begins by saying that **"A thing of beauty is a joy forever."** A beautiful thing remains a source of happiness throughout our lives. Its beauty increases with time rather than fading away. It gives us a peaceful shelter and provides a sense of comfort, like a pleasant place where we can rest and dream.

Keats compares a beautiful thing to **"a bower quiet for us"**, where we can enjoy pleasant dreams, good health and peaceful breathing. A bower is a shady, sheltered place, and the comparison suggests that beauty protects the human mind from the difficulties and worries of life.
The poet then acknowledges that human life is not always happy. We often experience **gloom, disappointment, sadness and suffering**. People may feel discouraged because of unhealthy and negative ways of living. Despite these difficulties, beautiful things help us overcome sadness and keep us connected with hope and positivity. Beauty acts as a continuous source of emotional strength.

Keats says that every day we create a **"flowery band"** that binds us to the earth. This suggests that beautiful experiences, memories and things of nature create a strong connection between human beings and life. Even when life becomes difficult, these beautiful experiences give us reasons to continue living and appreciating the world.

The poet then describes some of the beautiful things found in nature. He refers to the **sun, moon, old and young trees, daffodils and clear streams**. The sun and moon provide light and beauty; trees offer shade and shelter; daffodils add colour and freshness; and clear streams provide coolness and joy. These natural objects demonstrate how beauty surrounds human beings and continually refreshes their minds.

Keats also mentions **"the grandeur of the dooms"**, referring to the magnificent stories of great and heroic people. Such inspiring stories become another source of beauty because they remind people of courage, greatness and noble actions. The poet also imagines an **endless fountain of immortal drink** pouring from the heavens. This image suggests that beauty is divine, eternal and continuously available to humanity.

The poem therefore presents beauty as something much deeper than physical attractiveness. It includes the beauty of nature, inspiring human deeds, pleasant memories and everything that gives peace and hope to the human mind. Beauty helps people rise above sadness and makes life worth living.

The central idea of the poem is that **beauty is eternal and life-giving**. Although human life contains suffering, disappointment and darkness, beautiful things provide lasting joy, peace, hope and emotional strength. For Keats, beauty is like an everlasting source of nourishment for the human spirit.

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Poem 4: A Roadside Stand

A Roadside Stand by Robert Frost presents the suffering and hopes of poor rural people who set up a small roadside stand to earn some money from passing city people. The poem highlights the sharp economic and emotional divide between the countryside and the city. Frost looks at the rural poor with deep sympathy and criticises the indifference of the wealthy as well as the false promises of those who claim to help them.

The poem begins with a **little old house** beside a busy road. In front of it, the rural people have built a small new shed as a roadside stand. They offer **wild berries, golden squash** and the beauty of the surrounding mountain scene for sale. Their purpose is not to beg for food or charity. They want to earn some **cash** from the city people whose money supports the prosperity of the cities. They hope that earning some money will help them improve their lives.

The city people, however, pass the stand without showing any interest. The poet calls them **"polished traffic"** because they travel in sophisticated cars and belong to a more prosperous world. If they notice the stand at all, they are irritated by its crude appearance and poorly painted signs, particularly the letters **N and S turned the wrong way**. They see the stand as something that spoils the beauty of the countryside instead of understanding why the poor people have put it there.

The people running the stand have a **"childish longing"** that some passing car will stop and buy something. They wait throughout the day in the hope of earning a little money. Their desire is simple and genuine. They want a share of the prosperity they see in the cities and in the **"moving-pictures"** that show a comfortable and better life. Their longing is therefore not for luxury but for a chance to improve their standard of living.

The poet then speaks about the people who claim to work for the welfare of the rural poor. He describes them ironically as **"greedy good-doers"** and **"beneficent beasts of prey."** They pretend to help the villagers, but their plans actually exploit them and take away their independence. They want to relocate the rural people and provide them with planned facilities, but such so-called welfare does not truly understand their needs or respect their dignity.

The few cars that actually stop at the roadside stand do not bring the hoped-for business. One car stops only to turn around, another asks for directions, and another asks for petrol even though it is obvious that the stand does not sell petrol. Each such incident increases the disappointment of the poor sellers. Their expectation of earning money remains unfulfilled.

The poet feels deep sorrow when he sees the villagers waiting in **"trusting sorrow"** and **"almost open prayer."** Their innocent hope and helplessness become so painful for him that he momentarily wishes that their suffering could end at one stroke. However, he immediately recognises the disturbing nature of this thought. He realises that if someone offered to end his own suffering in the same way, he would strongly resent it.

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The poem ends with the poet's deep sympathy for the rural poor. The roadside stand becomes a symbol of their **poverty, hope, dignity and desire for a better life**. Frost exposes the selfishness of prosperous city people and the hypocrisy of those who claim to help the poor without genuinely understanding them. The poem ultimately calls for **economic fairness, human sympathy and respect for the dignity of rural people**.

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Poem 5: Aunt Jennifer's Tigers

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers by Adrienne Rich presents the suffering of a woman trapped in a male-dominated marriage and her desire for freedom and independence. Through the contrast between Aunt Jennifer's weak and oppressed life and the fearless tigers she creates in embroidery, the poet explores themes of **female oppression, freedom, fear, courage and the power of art**.

Aunt Jennifer is embroidering a panel showing **bright, lively tigers** moving across a green landscape. The tigers are described as moving confidently through the forest. They are fearless and powerful, and they do not appear to be afraid of the men around them. Their confidence and freedom are completely different from Aunt Jennifer's own life. The tigers therefore represent the qualities that Aunt Jennifer herself lacks in her real world but desires deeply.

Aunt Jennifer finds it difficult to move her fingers while doing the embroidery. Her hands are described as **"fluttering through her wool"**, showing her physical weakness and nervousness. She is also struggling to pull the needle. The poet suggests that her weakness is not simply physical. It is the result of years of oppression and fear within her married life.

The heavy **wedding ring** on Aunt Jennifer's finger becomes an important symbol. The ring represents her marriage and the burden of the life she has been forced to live. The poet says that the massive weight of her husband's domination **"sits heavily"** upon her hand. Thus, marriage, which is normally associated with love and companionship, is presented here as a source of oppression and suffering.

In contrast, the tigers that Aunt Jennifer creates are **proud, fearless and free**. They move confidently through the forest and do not fear the men beneath the tree. They represent the freedom and strength that Aunt Jennifer cannot experience herself. Through her art, however, she is able to imagine and create a world in which these qualities exist.

The final stanza presents Aunt Jennifer's condition after her death. Even when she is no longer alive, the marks of her suffering will remain visible in her hands. The poet suggests that she will have carried the burden of her unhappy married life until death. Her oppression has been so deep that it has shaped her entire existence.

However, the tigers she embroidered will continue to exist. They will remain **"proud and unafraid"** even after Aunt Jennifer is gone. Her art therefore becomes a form of lasting expression. Although she could not achieve freedom in her actual life, she creates symbols of freedom through her embroidery. Her artistic creation survives her and expresses the courage and independence she longed for.

The poem therefore contrasts **Aunt Jennifer's oppressed life with the fearless life of the tigers**. The tigers symbolise freedom, confidence and strength, while the wedding ring symbolises the burden of patriarchal marriage. Through Aunt Jennifer, Adrienne Rich draws attention to the suffering of women who are denied independence and freedom. At the same time, the poem suggests that art can preserve a person's dreams and aspirations even when those dreams cannot be fulfilled in real life.

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Vistas – Supplementary Reader

Lesson 1: The Third Level

The Third Level by Jack Finney is a science-fiction story that blends fantasy and reality. It is about **Charley**, a 31-year-old man who discovers what appears to be a mysterious third level at Grand Central Station in New York. The third level becomes a possible escape from the fear, insecurity, war, worry and stress of modern life into the peaceful world of the past.

One night, while trying to find the subway at **Grand Central Station**, Charley gets lost in its confusing passageways and discovers a **third level**. Though the station has only two levels, this one looks completely different. It has old-fashioned ticket windows, wooden gates, open-flame gaslights and brass spittoons, while the people wear nineteenth-century clothes. Charley soon realises that he has entered **1894**.

He sees an old newspaper called *The World*, dated **June 11, 1894**, and is fascinated by the peaceful atmosphere. He wants to go to **Galesburg, Illinois**, which he imagines as a quiet town with big houses, trees, gardens and music. He decides to buy two tickets for himself and his wife **Louisa**. However, he has only modern currency. The ticket clerk thinks it is fake and threatens to call the police, so Charley runs away and somehow returns to the modern station. Later, he gets old-style currency, but he cannot find the third level again.

Charley tells his psychiatrist friend **Sam Weiner** about his experience. Sam says that the third level is a **"waking-dream wish fulfilment"** caused by Charley's desire to escape modern pressures. He also calls stamp collecting a **"temporary refuge from reality"** because it allows Charley to retreat into the past. Charley is not completely convinced.

Later, Sam disappears. While examining his grandfather's **stamp collection**, Charley discovers a first-day cover postmarked **Galesburg, July 18, 1894**. Inside is a letter from Sam saying that he has found the third level and is living happily in Galesburg in 1894. Sam asks Charley and Louisa to join him. Charley also remembers that Sam had withdrawn **eight hundred dollars in old-style currency**, suggesting that he had prepared for such a journey.

The story therefore leaves the reader uncertain whether the third level is a real passage through time or a psychological escape. Its central idea is **escapism**. The stressful modern world makes people long for the peaceful past, and the third level symbolises this desire. Finney deliberately blends reality and fantasy to show how people may seek comfort in memories, hobbies, dreams and an imagined past when the present becomes difficult.

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Lesson 2: The Tiger King

The Tiger King by Kalki is a humorous and satirical story about the Maharaja of Pratibandapuram, whose life becomes dominated by his determination to defeat a prophecy. At his birth, astrologers predict that a tiger will cause his death. When the ten-day-old prince hears this, he boldly says, **"Let tigers beware!"** He grows up like an English child and becomes Maharaja at the age of twenty.

The Maharaja soon learns about the prophecy and decides to kill a hundred tigers to prove it wrong. He kills his first tiger and asks the astrologer about his fate. The astrologer warns him that the **hundredth tiger** will be dangerous. The Maharaja then bans everyone else from hunting tigers and becomes the sole tiger hunter in his kingdom. He kills seventy tigers in his own state. To continue his hunt, he marries a princess whose kingdom has a large tiger population and kills more tigers whenever he visits her kingdom, eventually reaching ninety-nine.

The Maharaja also faces a problem when a British officer wants to hunt a tiger in his state and have himself photographed with the dead animal. The Maharaja refuses because he wants to kill all the tigers himself. Fearing political trouble, he allows the officer's wife to choose a tiger instead. However, she does not actually hunt one. The Maharaja sends **fifty diamond rings** for her, hoping she will accept one and return the rest. She keeps all the rings, but the British officer remains satisfied, and the Maharaja avoids trouble.

Now only one tiger remains. The Maharaja becomes increasingly anxious because no tiger can be found, even in his father-in-law's kingdom. Finally, sheep begin disappearing in a village, suggesting that a tiger has arrived. The Maharaja goes hunting but cannot find it. In his frustration, he threatens to double the land tax and dismisses officials. The worried **Dewan** fears for his own position and secretly brings an old, weak tiger from the People's Park in Madras. With the help of his wife, he takes the tiger to the forest and leaves it where the Maharaja can find it.

The Maharaja sees the tiger, takes careful aim and shoots. The tiger falls, and the Maharaja believes that he has finally killed his **hundredth tiger**. He orders it to be taken to the capital in a grand procession. After he leaves, however, the hunters discover that the tiger is still alive. The Maharaja's bullet had missed it, and the tiger had merely fainted from fright. Fearing that they will lose their jobs, the hunters secretly shoot and kill it. The dead tiger is then taken in procession and buried with a tomb.

The Maharaja now believes that he has defeated the prophecy. On his son's third birthday, he searches for a special gift and finally buys a **wooden tiger** from a toyshop. The poorly made toy has rough wooden slivers sticking out from its surface. While playing with his son, one of the slivers pierces the Maharaja's hand. He removes it and continues playing, but the wound becomes infected and spreads up his arm. Three surgeons from Madras operate on him, but the Maharaja dies.

Thus, the prophecy is fulfilled in a highly ironic manner. The Maharaja spends his life killing real tigers to escape death by a tiger, but it is a **wooden tiger** that ultimately causes his death.

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Lesson 3: Journey to the End of the Earth

Journey to the End of the Earth by Tishani Doshi is a travelogue about the author's journey to Antarctica aboard the Russian research vessel **Akademik Shokalskiy**. The journey helps her understand Antarctica's geological history, its importance to the Earth's climate and the need to protect the environment.

The author begins her journey from **Madras**, travelling for more than 100 hours by car, aeroplane and ship. She crosses **nine time zones, six checkpoints, three bodies of water and several ecospheres** before reaching Antarctica, the coldest, driest and windiest continent. Its vast white landscape and uninterrupted blue horizon fill her with wonder, especially when she learns that India and Antarctica were once part of the same landmass.

The author takes the reader back **650 million years** to the time when a huge southern supercontinent called **Gondwana** existed. It was centred around present-day Antarctica and included India and other parts of the world. Gondwana had a warm climate and flourished for about 500 million years before breaking apart. The continents then gradually moved to their present positions. Antarctica's geological history therefore helps us understand the evolution of the Earth.

Antarctica is almost untouched by human civilisation and contains **about 90 per cent of the world's ice**. Its ice preserves a record of the Earth's climate and atmosphere from hundreds of thousands of years ago. By studying ice cores, scientists can understand past changes in temperature and carbon dioxide levels. The author points out that human beings have existed for only a tiny part of Earth's history, yet their activities have already caused major environmental changes.

The chapter discusses **global warming and climate change** caused by the increasing amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. The author explains the importance of **phytoplankton**, tiny marine plants that form the base of the Southern Ocean's food chain and absorb carbon dioxide. If global warming affects phytoplankton, the entire food chain and carbon cycle can be disturbed, showing how closely the parts of nature are connected.

The author is part of the **Students on Ice** programme started by Canadian **Geoff Green**. The programme takes school students to Antarctica because they may become future policymakers and leaders. Seeing climate change directly can make them more responsible towards the planet. Instead of merely reading about global warming, they can observe its effects on glaciers and ice shelves.

One memorable experience occurs when the **Akademik Shokalskiy** becomes stuck in thick sea ice near the Antarctic Circle. The passengers are allowed to climb down and **walk on the ocean**. Standing on a metre-thick layer of ice with seawater beneath them makes the author realise how delicate the balance of nature is.

The journey makes the author think about Antarctica's future and humanity's survival. Her experience with the young students also gives her hope that the next generation can help protect the planet.

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Lesson 4: The Enemy

The Enemy by Pearl S. Buck is a story about **Dr Sadao Hoki**, a Japanese surgeon who faces a difficult conflict between his duty as a doctor and his duty as a Japanese citizen during the war. When an injured American prisoner reaches his house, Sadao must decide whether to save his life or hand him over to the authorities.

Dr Sadao lives with his wife **Hana** in a house on the Japanese coast. He had studied medicine in America because his father wanted him to become a highly skilled doctor. There he met Hana, another Japanese student, and they married after returning to Japan. Sadao has become a successful surgeon and is kept at home by the Japanese General because of his medical importance.

One evening, Sadao and Hana see a wounded man washed ashore near their house. They soon realise that he is an **American prisoner of war**, badly wounded and almost unconscious. Since Japan is at war with America, Sadao knows that helping him may be considered an act of treason. Yet as a doctor, he cannot allow a dying man to remain untreated. He and Hana carry the man into the house.

The servants strongly object to treating the American. **Yumi**, the maid, refuses to wash him, while the cook and gardener also feel that an enemy should not be given shelter. Sadao and Hana operate on the prisoner themselves. Sadao removes a bullet from his body and saves his life. They discover that the man's name is **Tom**, although he is also referred to as **Tom G.** He is a young American prisoner who had escaped from captivity.

After the operation, Sadao decides that he must inform the **General** about the American. The General promises to send his private assassins to kill the prisoner secretly, so that Sadao will not have to face legal consequences. However, the General forgets about the matter because he is preoccupied with his own health and his planned operation. Several days pass, and the prisoner remains hidden in Sadao's house.

Meanwhile, Tom gradually recovers. The servants have already left the house because they disapprove of Sadao's decision to shelter the enemy. Hana continues to care for the prisoner despite her fear and discomfort. Sadao begins to realise that keeping Tom hidden is becoming increasingly dangerous for his family.

Finally, Sadao decides to help Tom escape. He gives him a boat, food, water and instructions to reach a nearby island and wait for a Korean fishing boat. He tells Tom to use a signal if he needs help. Sadao watches the sea and becomes anxious when no signal appears for several days. He eventually realises that Tom has escaped safely.

Sadao then tells the General that the prisoner has disappeared. The General admits that he had completely forgotten his promise to send the assassins. Sadao does not reveal that he himself helped Tom escape.

The story presents a conflict between **patriotism and humanity**. Dr Sadao's decision to save and finally help the enemy escape reveals the power of compassion, professional duty and moral courage.

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Lesson 5: On the Face of It

On the Face of It by Susan Hill is a play about loneliness, physical disability, social prejudice and the importance of accepting life positively. It presents the meeting of **Derry**, a fourteen-year-old boy whose face has been badly burned by acid, and **Mr Lamb**, an old man who has lost a leg and wears a tin one. Their meeting gradually changes Derry's attitude towards himself and the world.

Derry enters Mr Lamb's garden by climbing over the wall because he believes the garden is empty. Mr Lamb, however, is there and calmly welcomes him. He keeps his gate open because he likes meeting people. Derry is suspicious and expects Mr Lamb to react to his disfigured face as other people usually do. He says that people stare at him, pity him or are afraid of him. He has become withdrawn and avoids people because of their reactions.

Derry explains that one side of his face was burned away by acid. He believes his appearance makes him different from everyone else. Mr Lamb, however, does not pity him. He tells Derry that he too has a physical disability because his real leg was blown off years ago and he now has a **tin leg**. Children call him **"Lamey-Lamb"**, but he does not allow their words to trouble him. He tells Derry that there are many things worth noticing besides people's physical appearance, such as flowers, weeds, bees, trees and crab apples.

Mr Lamb explains that he considers both weeds and flowers part of life and asks Derry why one growing plant should be called a weed and another a flower. He encourages Derry to look at life differently. He also tells him about a man who was so afraid of everything that he locked himself inside a room. Ironically, a picture fell from the wall and killed him. Through this story, Mr Lamb shows that shutting oneself away cannot protect a person from life or death.

Mr Lamb lives alone but does not consider himself completely isolated. He reads books, sits in the sun, listens to bees and keeps his gate open. He believes that people should accept both the good and unpleasant things in life. Derry is gradually attracted to his positive outlook because Mr Lamb is the first person who talks to him naturally without fear or pity.

Derry returns home and tells his mother about Mr Lamb. His mother is worried and tries to stop him from going back because she does not trust the old man. Derry, however, has been deeply affected by his conversation with Mr Lamb. For the first time, he refuses to remain confined by fear and decides that he must return to the garden. He tells his mother that if he does not go back, he may never go anywhere in the world.

When Derry returns to the garden, he finds that **Mr Lamb has fallen from a ladder** while picking crab apples. Derry calls to him and tries to wake him, but Mr Lamb remains silent. Derry is overcome with grief and says that he has come back. The play ends with Derry beside Mr Lamb, leaving the exact outcome of his future open but strongly suggesting that Mr Lamb's brief friendship has changed him.

The play shows that **loneliness, fear and social rejection can make life more difficult for people living with physical disabilities**. It also suggests that people should not judge themselves or others merely by appearance. Acceptance, companionship and a positive attitude can help a person overcome isolation and discover the courage to live fully.

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Lesson 6: Memories of Childhood

Memories of Childhood by Zitkala-Sa and Bama contains two autobiographical accounts. Both writers describe painful experiences of discrimination during childhood. The first part deals with racial and cultural discrimination, while the second deals with caste discrimination.

Part I: The Cutting of My Long Hair

Zitkala-Sa describes her first days at the Carlisle Indian School. Everything there is strange to her. The children have to follow many strict rules. She feels uncomfortable in the unfamiliar clothes and does not understand the rules of the dining room. She becomes frightened and confused.

Her friend **Judewin** tells her that the school authorities are going to cut their long hair. Zitkala-Sa is shocked because long hair is important in her Native American culture. Short hair is worn by mourners, while shingled hair is associated with cowards or captured warriors. She does not want her hair to be cut.

When she learns that the authorities are looking for her, she hides under a bed. However, they find her and drag her out. She is taken to a room, tied to a chair and her long hair is cut against her will. She cries and struggles, but nobody listens to her.

The incident makes her feel helpless and deeply hurt. For her, cutting her hair is not simply a change in appearance. It is an attack on her **culture, identity and freedom**. Her attempt to hide shows her strong wish to protect her own identity.

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Part II: We Too Are Human Beings

Bama recalls an incident from her childhood that made her understand the unfairness of the caste system. One day, while returning from school, she sees an old man from her community carrying a small packet of **vadais** by its string. He holds it carefully without touching it. Bama finds the sight funny and tells her elder brother **Annan** about it.

Annan explains that the old man is working for an upper-caste landlord. The landlord believes that the old man will pollute the food if he touches it because of his caste. Bama is shocked and angry when she learns the reason. She cannot understand why one person should be treated as inferior to another simply because of birth.

Annan tells her that people from their community face such treatment because of caste. He advises her to **study hard and make progress in life**. He tells her that education can help her earn respect and overcome such humiliation.

Bama takes his advice seriously. She works hard in her studies, stands first in her class and gains the respect of others.

Both parts show how children can recognise injustice even at a young age. **Zitkala-Sa resists the attempt to take away her cultural identity, while Bama chooses education and hard work to fight against caste discrimination.** Both stories highlight the importance of dignity, equality, self-respect and resistance to unfair treatment.

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