

Chapter 3

The Letter

NCERT Question Answers

4. Answer the following questions by ticking the correct options:

(a) Ali's walking to the Post Office daily even in biting cold weather shows his _____.

- (i) courage
- (ii) optimism
- (iii) foolishness
- (iv) strength of will

Answer

(iv) strength of will

(b) The Post Office is referred to as Ali's "place of pilgrimage" as he _____.

- (i) visited it daily
- (ii) came there to pray for a letter from his daughter
- (iii) went there with faith and hope
- (iv) believed God would bless him if he went there

Answer

(iii) went there with faith and hope

(c) The Post Master's rudeness to Ali reveals his _____.

- (i) lack of empathy
- (ii) preoccupation with his work
- (iii) preconceived notions
- (iv) sensitivity

Answer

(i) lack of empathy

(d) Ali did not come to the Post Office for several days as _____.

- (i) he had given up hope
- (ii) he was upset by the Post Master's rebuke
- (iii) he was unwell and not able to walk to the Post Office
- (iv) he was busy hunting

Answer

(iii) he was unwell and not able to walk to the Post Office

(e) "Tortured by doubt and remorse, he sat down in the glow of the charcoal sigri to wait."
The Post Master was waiting for_____.

- (i) a letter from Miriam
- (ii) a letter from his own daughter
- (iii) a letter from Ali
- (iv) Ali to deliver Miriam's letter to him.

Answer

(ii) a letter from his own daughter

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5. Answer the following questions briefly.

(a) Who was Ali? Where did he go daily?

Answer

Ali was a clever and crack shot hunter, Coachman. He was so obsessed with hunting that not a day would pass when he would not hunt. He would go to the post office daily.

(b) "Ali displays qualities of love and patience". Give evidence from the story to support the statement.

Answer

Ali had been visiting the post office regularly for last five years to get a letter from his only daughter, Miriam about her well-being. He was the first one to arrive at the post office and last one to go. Such was the height of his love for his daughter. He even suffered insult, humiliation and ridicule of the post office employees patiently. Though he had grown extremely old and frail and his end was drawing near, yet he gave five gold guineas to Lakshmi Das, a post office clerk, to deliver the letter at his grave. So he was an epitome of love, patience, hope and faith.

(c) How do you know Ali was a familiar figure at the post office?

Answer

Ali was a well known figure at the post office because he had been visiting the post office

regularly for last five years. He sat on the same bench everyday waiting for his name to be called. The postmen made fun of him. Even though there would be no letter for him, they would call out his name, just to see his reaction. The post office became a place of pilgrimage for Ali. Even bad weather could not deter him. He was always the first one to arrive to the post office.

(d) Why did Ali give up hunting?

Answer

His only daughter Miriam got married and left him. Ali then understood the real meaning of love and separation. So he gave up hunting.

(e) What impression do you form of the postmaster after reading the story 'The Letter'?

Answer

In the beginning the postmaster appears to be haughty, arrogant, ill-tempered, unfeeling, selfish, impatient, insensitive, indifferent, irresponsible and unresponsive. His face is as inexpressive as a pumpkin. There is no sign of loveliness in his features. He does not understand Ali's feelings and anxiety. He considers Ali a mad man and rebuke him by calling him a 'pest'. But, he undergoes a complete transformation when he himself faces the mental trauma of not getting the news of his own daughter's well-being. Now he realises the pain and suffering of Ali. He is full of remorse, guilt and repentance. He becomes loving, caring, helpful and sympathetic.

(f) The postmaster says to Ali, "What a pest you are, brother!" Do you agree with the statement? Give reasons for your answer.

Answer

Ali used to go to the post office daily. He would go and sit at a particular bench everyday, waiting for his name to be called out. He would not bother anyone. On that particular day, he had come to the post office after several days as he had fallen ill. Since he had not come for many days, he enquired for his letter from the postmaster. The postmaster, who was in a hurry to leave, lost his temper on Ali and called him a pest. Ali was not at all a pest; it was just that he came after many days so he was curious to know whether a letter had come for him.

(g) "Ali came out very slowly, turning after every few steps to gaze at the post office. His eyes were filled with tears of helplessness, for his patience was exhausted, even though he still had faith." Why were Ali's eyes filled with tears of helplessness? What had exhausted his patience but not his faith?

Answer

Ali had waited endlessly for his daughter's letter, he felt helpless. The employees at the post-office made fun of him but he couldn't resist the temptation of seeing Miriam's letter. When

he was insulted by the post master, who called him a 'pest', Ali's patience was exhausted but his unflinching hope told him that a letter would surely arrive.

(h) "Tortured by doubt and remorse, he sat down in the glow of the charcoal sigri to wait." Who is tortured by doubt and remorse? Why? What is he waiting for?

Answer

The postmaster is tortured by doubt and remorse. He is filled with remorse because he failed to understand Ali's concern about his daughter. The postmaster's daughter was unwell and he anxiously waited for some news of her. When he saw an envelope of a shape and colour that he expected, he quickly snatched it. However, it was not addressed to him but to Ali. His disappointment at not receiving any news of his daughter made him realize the sorrow and pain of Ali who had waited for five years for some news from his daughter.

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6.

Loneliness	Grief
<p>An old man was walking through the town, now and again drawing his tattered clothes tighter to shield his body from the cold and biting wind.</p> <p>His lonely way</p>	<p>The whole town was wrapped in deathly silence</p>

Answer

Loneliness	Grief
<p>An old man was walking through the town, now and again drawing his tattered clothes tighter to shield his body from the cold and biting wind.</p> <p>His lonely way</p> <p>The old man went back slowly to the bench on which he had been accustomed to sit for five long years.</p> <p>...such loneliness had come into his life since the day Miriam had gone away, that now, forgetting his sport, he would become lost in the admiration of the green of the green cornfield.</p> <p>A pitiable figure, a century behind his time.</p>	<p>The whole town was wrapped in deathly silence</p> <p>...for the last five years he had no news of this daughter for whose sake alone he dragged along a cheerless existence.</p> <p>...that the grief of separation is inescapable.</p> <p>...he sat down under a tree and wept bitterly.</p> <p>His eyes were filled with tears of helplessness...</p>

7. Complete the table by explaining the following phrases/ sentences in your own words:

Phrases	Meanings
happy memories light up a life that is nearing its close	
the sounds helped him along his lonely way	
the cold used sleep to extend its sway over all things even as a false friend lulls his chosen victim with caressing smiles	
when the evening of his life was drawing in, he left his old ways and suddenly took a new turn	
the whole universe is built up through love and that the grief of separation is inescapable	
the post-master, a man with a face as sad and as inexpressive as a pumpkin, would be seen sitting on his chair inside	
And so the clerk, like a worshipper of Vishnu, repeated his customary thousand names	
The haughty temper of the official had quite left him in his sorrow and anxiety, and had laid bare his human heart	

Answer

Happy memories are a source of joy when one is old and about to die.

The sounds of grinding mills, women singing at work were like a company in his otherwise long, lonely journey from his home to the post office.

The early morning cold induced sleep as a result everybody would be fast asleep and there would be no activity. The early morning cold is just like a person who pretends to be a friend influences its victim with sweet talk.

When Ali grew old, he gave up hunting as he could now understand the pain of getting separated from a loved one. Life had changed for him. His only daughter got married and left him.

Ali after being separated from his daughter realized that the whole world is made of love and the pain of separation is unbearable.

The postmaster had a cheerless and expressionless face just like a pumpkin and would always be seen sitting on his chair inside the post office.

Just as a follower of lord Vishnu would utter thousand names of Vishnu everyday, the clerk would call out the usual names for whom the letters came everyday.

As the postmaster eagerly awaited news from his daughter, he realized how arrogant and indifferent he was. Just like Ali, he was also worried for his daughter.

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Writing Task

9. Tortured by doubt and remorse, the postmaster sits in the glow of a charcoal sigri that night, waiting for news of his daughter. As he sits, he writes his diary. As the postmaster, write a diary entry in about 150 words outlining your feelings about the day's events.

Answer

30th November

Dear Diary

I am inundated with the feelings of doubt and remorse at what happened today. I have been waiting anxiously for the news of my daughter's well being who lay ill at a distant town. I saw an envelop of the colour and shape I had expected to receive. But to my surprise, it was addressed to Coachman Ali from his daughter Miriam. I dropped it once as if it had given me an electric shock. I could not sleep whole night. I realised my folly for being rude, unsympathetic and ununderstanding to Ali. I never tried to realise the anguish, pain and suffering of a father who had been waiting anxiously for his daughter's letter for last five years. I once even rebuked him by calling him a 'pest'. I failed to understand the pain and grief of separation that Ali was undergoing. Now I realised my stupidity for being indifferent and insensitive to him. I decided to handover the letter to Ali.

At the stroke of five I heard a soft knock on the door. Feeling sure it was Ali, I rose quickly from the chair and flung the door wide open. Ali was standing outside, leaning on a stick bent double with age. Tears were wet on his face. His eyes had an unearthly light. I shrank back in fear and astonishment. But soon, Lakshmi Das who appeared from another quarter told me that Ali had died three months ago. I was confused. I was overwhelmed with the feelings of doubt. Had I really seen Ali or had my imagination deceived me? Now I understand the pangs of separation because it has been well said, "Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches". I regret my rude behaviour towards Ali.