

Short Stories1.

The Lament

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Q. 1 Comment on the indifference that meets Iona's attempts to share his grief with his fellow human beings.

Answer:

Iona's son had died that week of high fever. He was feeling intense grief and sorrow. He wanted to share the story of his suffering with another person but no one was interested. Whoever he came in contact with showed indifference because they were busy, tired or just in a hurry. They had their own troubles so they did not want to burden themselves with the affairs of others.

Q. 2 What impression of the character of Iona do you get from this story?

Answer:

Iona, the protagonist of the story, was an old cab driver. He was like a phantom in the society because he was lonely and longed for a companion to share his emotions. He had recently lost his only son and family member and felt intense grief and sorrow at his terrible loss. He found no companion to share his sad story because his passengers were too busy with their own troubles to heed his desperate attempts at sharing. His grief and melancholy surrounded him and he was always lost in thoughts of his son whom he missed terribly. When his desperate attempts failed, he turned to his horse to share his sad story.

Q. 3 How does the horse serve as a true friend and companion to Iona?

Answer:

The horse serves as a true friend and companion to Iona because his fellow human beings were indifferent to his sufferings. After his alienation from



the society, he began to confide in his horse who listened silently without judging him like a true friend. His desperate attempts at communication had failed so he discussed his whole story to the horse, feeding it hay, saying that he wishes that his son was still alive to support him in his old age.

TALKING ABOUT THE TEXT

Q. 1 Discuss the following in pairs

Empathy and understanding are going out of modern society.

The individual experiences intense alienation from the society around him or her.

Answer:

- For

It is the sad, undeniable truth. Understanding and empathy are indeed becoming a thing of the past.

People in the modern society are so busy dealing with their own problems that they don't have the patience or time to sympathize with other fellow beings. The pressure of work has made them insensitive and mechanical. They only care about meeting their own needs above all others and seldom stop to offer an empathetic ear to the sorrows and shortcomings of others.

There are several people like Iona who face this problem daily and sink into further depression from lack of emotional support.

- Against

While this statement is the best way to describe modern society, we cannot deny that there are still some people who care about the feelings of others and try their best to support them.



Family and close friends are the best examples of such people. Empathy is one of the social abilities that show our dependency on each other for emotional and psychological support.

It is important to have empathy because it brings people together and strengthens the bonds between people.

Q. 2 Discuss the following in pairs

Behind the public face of the people in various occupations is a whole saga of personal suffering and joy which they wish to share with others.

Answer:

- For

In the recent times, humans tend to lock away their inner selves in the name of practicality and reasoning. Their daily lives are full of work that keeps them busy all the times so they do not get the time to share their true feelings and emotions with others. But they yearn to have a companion to share their inner self with. They put on a mask to hide their inner vulnerability so that they are not left out of society and become alienated like Iona. Everybody has a story that they wish to tell but are incapable of expressing their true selves freely.

- Against

People in various occupations have different stories to share in spite of their public face but some choose to keep their feelings suppressed and have no desire to share it. People do not wish to share their own stories because it might expose their secrets and weaknesses to strangers and they might become the subject of gossip and incessant rumors. To avoid such confrontations people, bottle up their emotions in order to live serene, peaceful lives, free from judgment and scrutiny of onlookers. They struggle to make ends meet and contribute to society with technological advancements, to show off their confidence and control over loose 'emotions', and to secure a permanent position for themselves in the



society. They resort to drinking to drown their sorrows and disappointments and invite others to do so, swapping sob stories and forgetting them instantly on the following day.

APPRECIATION

Q. 1 The story begins with a description of the setting. How does this serve as a fitting prelude to the events described in the story?

Answer:

The setting in the story evokes the mood of the story which is of gloom and sorrow.

The darkness and snow, in the beginning, represents the protagonist's grief and melancholy and also gives the readers an insight into his mind and situation. Iona appears to have lost interest in his surroundings because his movements appeared phantom-like and neglectful. This description of the setting sets the mood for a story of suffering as this environment is ever present in Iona's mind and in his life.

By the end of the story, he ends up in a similar situation as he has been coldly rejected by everyone he tried to share his suffering with and left in darkness and solitude.

Q. 2 Comment on the graphic detail with which the various passengers who took Iona's cab are described.

Answer:

The passengers of Iona are described in graphic detail as they represent people from various walks of life.

A policeman is an impatient man who is uninterested in listening to his story because he is in a hurry and the only conversation he has is criticizing Iona for driving rashly and asking him to go faster. The three drunkards also offer no sympathy in Iona's sorrow because they hurl

insults and swear at him and react indifferently when he mentions his son's death.

These details show how unconcerned and indifferent they are to Iona's grief, caring only about their own affairs.

Q. 3 This short story revolves around a single important event. Discuss how the narrative is woven around this central fact.

Answer:

There is only one important event in the story, which is Iona's mission to share his grief and suffering with someone to ease his pain.

The narrative is woven around this one objective of the narration. Iona is an old cab driver, who had low income and had recently lost his son to death. His heart was full of grief and he wished to turn to another soul to pour his sufferings out to, but he failed miserably. His passengers all reject his attempts at sharing his story and this overwhelms him. His agony and despair grow when he realizes that he is an alien in this society. His horse is the only one he can turn to, in order to share his grief as it listens patiently.

The main event of the story is Iona's struggle and vain attempts to overcome his grief and the narrative revolves around it.

Q. 4 The story begins and ends with Iona and his horse. Comment on the significance of this to the plot of the story.

Answer:

The story revolves around Iona and his horse. It begins with them and ends with them as they are sole companions in solitude and suffering.

The plot offers a social commentary on the nature of human beings in the modern society where they are disinterested in the affairs of others and their frustration in their loneliness causes them to vent it on animals, such as a horse. The horse only fulfills its duty regardless of its master's mood and

offers a silent ear to his sufferings because he has been rejected by society. Both master and horse appear to be parts of a whole as each is portrayed as neglectful and melancholic. His horse is his only companion by the end of the story.

LANGUAGE WORK

Q. 1 Look at the following set of words and mention what is common to them both in form and meaning:

snuffle, snort, sniffle, snore

Answer:

All sounds are made with the nose.

Snuffle means breathe noisily through the nose due to cold or crying.

Snort means an explosive sound made through the nose by suddenly forcing breath out to express anger or mockery.

Sniffle means an act or sound of sniffing due to crying or colds.

Snore means a grunting sound one makes while he is breathing in his sleep.

Q. 2 Look at the words given in the box below

1. snigger, wriggle, sneak, squeak
2. squawk, titter, pant, chuckle
3. giggle, jeer, chortle, guffaw
4. sigh, sidle, boo, shriek
5. scramble, croak, straggle, plod gasp

Now classify them according to their closeness in meaning to the words are given below

A	B	C	D	E
Snigger	Wriggle	Squeak	Jeer	Sigh



Answer:

A	B	C	D	
Giggle	Sneak	Squak	Boo	Pant
Chuckle	Plod	Shriek		Gasp
Titter	Straggle	Guffaw		Sigh
	Scramble	Chortle		Croak
	Sidle			

Q. 3 Explain the associations that the color 'white' has in the story.

Answer:

The color white in the story is given to snow and light but it portrays the protagonist's misery and gloom. It represents the winter season which is lethargic and slow paced and also despair since the protagonist is lonely and grief-stricken. Also, he appears white as a phantom due to his loneliness and withered appearance. The white snow is emphasized by evening lamp light which represents the depressing atmosphere and the hollowness of the society.

Q. 4 What does the phrase 'as if he were on needles' mean? Can you think of another phrase with a similar meaning substituting the word 'needles'?

Answer:

The phrase means that the individual is nervous and unsure of upcoming events.

Another phrase similar in meaning, substituting the word 'needles' is tenterhooks which are similar to a cloth on the tender.

