

12. The Dear Departed (Drama)

Text Book Questions

1. Read an excerpt from the diary of a man of 72 years :



As I sit here alone and waiting
I gaze at people passing me by.
I try to smile and reach out to them But no one notices; no one waits.
They look to me like I am nothing-
Are they afraid to be seen saying "Hi" to an old man like me?
Once my life, it's like a flower,
I had bloomed into a child.
Now, like the dying flower
Waiting for my one day to come-
It will be then that I am gone,
And yet, I still would not have heard that simple word, "Hi"
That for so long my heart had desired.

- What do you think is he feeling ?
- What situation do you think leads to people feeling so ?
- Can such people be helped ? How ?

Answer:

- He is feeling lonely and sad. ‘
- Uncaring attitude of family and friends lead to this gloomy feeling.
- Yes, we can certainly help a lonely and elderly feel wanted again.
Curative, presentative and rehabilitative measures should be the major

concern while implementing any programme for the elderly. Clubs for the elderly should be set up where they can engage themselves in various activities that would be helpful in keeping them energetic and boost their stamina.

2. Read the news story given below.

India's elderly face growing neglect

By Tinku Ray

BBC News, Delhi

There has been a steady rise recently in reports of cases of elderly being abused, harassed and abandoned in India.

Traditionally older people have been revered in India, signified by the touching of their feet by the younger generation.

Prime ministers and Presidents have almost always been senior citizens.

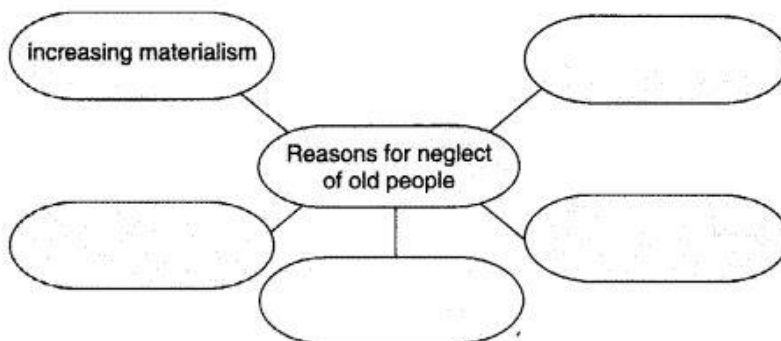
Joint family systems-where three or more generations lived under one roof - were a strong support-network for the elderly.

But more children are now leaving their parental homes to set up their own.

Discuss in groups :

(a) What are the reasons for the old people being “abused, harassed and abandoned” in India ?

(b) What are the problems faced by the old people as a result ?



Answer:

(a) The news is really an eye-opener in a country like India, where children are expected to take great care of their elderly so as to express gratitude to them. An extended family was the norm where parents and grandparents were revered by their children. However, western influence and dwindling moral values have led to an unpleasant situation where old people are being “abused, harassed and

abandoned". Social and economic development has caused the extended family system to change into a single family system. Old people, generally, find it hard to adjust their way of thinking that results in a clash between them and the somewhat rigid and insensitive younger generation.

(b) Due to this lack of emotional, moral and even financial support, old people are facing many problems.

- a feeling of loneliness and being neglected
- physical and mental impairment
- emotional trauma resulting in sleeplessness and anxiety
- feeling of insecurity and loss of dignity.



(b) These problems are: loneliness, neglect, absence of communication among their own, lack of sympathy, no medical help, growing independence on others, absence of interacting with others at social level, not sharing of grief etc.

3. The play 'The Dear Departed' can be performed on the stage. The first step would be a dramatized reading of the play as a whole class activity. Later, your teacher will assign you roles which you will play after an audition. Later the play can be put up on stage.

Characters

Sisters MRS. SLATER

 MRS. JORDAN

Their Husbands HENRY SLATER

 BEN JORDAN

VICTORIA SLATER : Daughter of Mrs. and Mr. Slater

ABEL MERRYWEATHER Father of Mrs. Slater and Mrs. Jordan

Answer: Students do yourself

4. Given below are the main incidents in the play. They are in a jumbled order. Arrange them in the sequence in which they occur in the play.

1. Victoria is asked to fetch the bunch of keys to the bureau to look for the insurance receipt.
2. Mrs. Slater instructs Victoria to put her white frock on with a black sash.
3. Mrs. Slater discovers that grandfather is 'dead'.
4. The Slaters fetch the bureau and the clock from upstairs.
5. The family sits down to have tea.
6. Henry wears the new slippers of grandfather's.
7. Grandfather comes to know how his daughters were in a hurry to divide his things between them.
8. Grandfather announces his intention to change his will and to marry Mrs. Shorrocks.
9. Grandfather comes down and is surprised to find the Jordans.
10. They discuss the obituary announcement in the papers and the insurance premium payment.
11. The Jordans arrive and learn the details of grandfather's 'demise' from the Slaters.

Answer:

1. Mrs. Slater discovers that grandfather is 'dead'.
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5. Answer the following questions briefly.

(i). How does Mrs. Slater plan to outshine the Jordans? What does it reveal about her character?

Answer:

Mrs. Slater is doubtful about her sister and her husband, Jordans arrival at grandfathers demise. Mrs. Slater is also anxious about grandfathers insurance premium and looks for it. She also brings grandfathers bureau down from his room. Before her sister arrived, she tried to have every asset of grandfather in possession. She is a ruthless and self-centered person.

(ii). Why does Mrs. Slater decide to shift the bureau from grandfather's room before the arrival of the Jordans? How does Henry react to the suggestion?

Answer:

Mrs. Slater wants to shift the bureau down because this was a recent purchase and was eye-catching. Moreover, she did not want her sister to even have a look at it. Henry suggested that she should divide the grandfather's assets mutually between herself and her sister

(iii). What is the reason for the Jordans taking a long time to get to the house of the Slaters? What does it show about the two sisters' attitude towards each other?

Answer:

Jordans took a long time in getting to reach the Slaters because they had to arrange for the mourning dresses for themselves. Since the readymades did not work for Elizabeth, she might have to get them – stitched. Both the sisters had rivalry between them for every worthless thing. They could not stand each other.

(iv). What does Mrs. Jordan describe as 'a fatal mistake' ? What is the irony in the comment she makes on Mrs. Slater's defence?

Answer:

Mrs. Jordan meant by 'fatal mistake' that Slater had not called another doctor to examine when grandfather was lying with his eyes closed. She called this as 'professional etiquette'. But Mrs. Jordan is a hypocrite as she is chiding Mrs. Slater for not calling the doctor but she herself could not make it on time for such a grave occasion.

(v). Ben appreciates grandfather saying 'its' a good thing he did'. Later he calls him a 'drunken old beggar'. Why does he change his opinion about grandfather?

Answer:

Ben learnt that grandfather went in the morning to pay his insurance premium, he said 'it's a good thing he did' but later when he came to know from Victoria that he had not gone to pay premium but went to meet Mrs. Shorrocks, he commented that he was a drunken beggar

(vi). What change does grandfather make in his new will? What effect does it have on his daughters?

Answer:

The grandfather announced that he would bequeath his wealth to Mrs. Shorrocks whom he was going to marry on the coming Monday and that he would look after him in old age. He also reminded both his daughters about how eager they were to divide his assets when he was still alive.

His daughters were aghast to hear this.

(vii). What are the three things that grandfather plans to do on Monday next?

Answer:

Three things he planned to do are that he would go to his lawyer and change his will, he would go to insurance company and pay his premium, he would also go to St. Philips Church and marry Mrs. John Shorrocks.

6. Answer the following in detail:

(1). Bring out the irony in the title of the play.

Answer:

The title of the play 'The Dear Departed' literally means that somebody dear has departed/ died and is no more with us. It makes everyone closely connected with the departed person sad and upset. Everyone is at a loss and tries to cope up with the situation. In this case, the title is ironical because nobody in the family loved grandfather. He was dear to no one. They all are relieved that he is no more. They talk of everything from mourning outfit to what all he has left behind but nobody is in a hurry to even go and see him. He is supposed to be dead and lying in his room. They all decide to have tea, discuss the obituary that should go in the newspapers but no one either has tears in his/ her eyes or is missing the grandfather. They are

very businesslike and their business seems to be what each one of them will get now that the old man is dead. In no way was he 'dear' to his daughters or their husbands. Mrs Jordan had not even visited her father in the last three years since the time he had moved to Mrs Slater's home. So much for a dear father! If she was there today, it was to show off in the society and to ensure that she gets her share of whatever he has left behind. Ironical, isn't it?

(2). How does the spat between his daughters lead to grandfather discovering the truth?

Answer:

Both the sisters are discussing about their share and Mrs Slater spills the beans when she tells grandfather that it was her husband who was wearing his slippers and they had brought his bureau downstairs. She also tells him that she was the one who had declared that he was dead. Grandfather is shocked when he comes to know all this. He is upset that his daughters want him to die. He also sees his clock downstairs. He understands that his daughters do not love him. They only want his wealth and belongings. They have no interest, whatsoever, in his well being. For them he is nothing more than a nuisance and they wish that he is out of their lives at the earliest. They are very happy that he is dead. Mrs Slater does not even call the doctor to confirm. She decides, informs her sister and even gives the tailor order for the mourning outfits.

(3). Compare and contrast Henry's character with that of his wife. Support your answer with evidence from the play.

Answer:

Mrs and Mr Slater are seen as a couple who complement each other. But this is on the surface. Mrs Slater is a domineering lady and always wants to have the last word. Henry follows her instructions diligently. When she asks him to wear the grandfather's slippers, as his are torn, he does not say a word. When it comes to shifting the bureau from grandfather's room it is her decision. He walks behind her like a lamb. Mrs Slater does not allow him to give his opinion on any issue. He is a meek character who is scared of saying anything in front of his wife.

7. Bring out the traits in Mrs. Slater's personality quoting evidence from the play.

Trait	Evidence from the play
greedy	
Overpowering/dominating	

Blunt/straight talking	
impolite	
Insensitive	

Answer:

Trait	Evidence from the play
Greedy	Henry, I've been thinking about that bureau of grandfather's that's in his bedroom. You know I always wanted to have it after he died.
Overpowering/ dominating	I'll fasten the front door. Get your coat off. Henry; we'll change it.
Blunt/ straight talking	Promised to your Jimmy/I never heard of that.
Impolite	After all I've done for him, having to put up with him in the house these years, it's nothing short of swindling.
Insensitive	Well, will you go up and look at him now or shall we have tea?

8. Answer the following with reference to the context.

1. "Are we pinching it before Aunt Elizabeth comes?"

(a) What does 'it' refer to here?

Answer:

'It' here refers to grandfather's bureau which Mrs Slater plans to keep for herself.

(b) How does Vicky conclude that her parents are 'pinching it'?

Answer:

Vicky's parents wanted to get the bureau before Mrs Slater's sister arrived for the funeral.

(c) Mention the two reasons that Mrs. Slater gives for her action.

Answer:

According to her, she wanted the bureau because she liked it very much. Second reason for wanting it was out of jealousy. She did not want her sister to get it.

(d) What does it reveal about the difference between the attitude of the elders and that of Vicky?

Answer:

Vicky genuinely loved her grandfather. She did not like the way elders are fighting over petty things. They are all money-minded and there is no sensitivity.

2. "7 don't call that delicate, stepping into a dead man's shoes in such haste."

(a) Who makes this comment?

Answer:

Mrs Jordan makes this comment.

(b) What prompts the speaker to say this?

Answer:

She says this because Henry had started wearing grandfather's slippers even before he was medically declared dead.

(c) Bring out the significance of this statement.

Answer:

It reveals the pettiness of all the adult characters. They all are trying to show the others, in bad light. Also, here, it is truly in haste as the grandfather is very much alive and not dead.

3. "Now, Amelia, you mustn't give way. We've all got to die some time or other. It might have been worse."

(a) Who is the speaker of these lines?

Answer:

Ben is the speaker of these lines.

(b) What prompts the speaker to say these words?

Answer:

The speaker says these words when he meets Mrs Slater. He is trying to console her.

(c) What does he mean when he says 'It might have been worse'?

Answer:

Grandfather had died without giving any trouble to anybody. If he had been bedridden, it would have been worse for everybody.

(d) What does it reveal about the speaker's character?

Answer:

These lines reveal that the speaker is able to talk about death without getting upset.

9. Writing

Victoria Slater is truly attached to her Grandpa. As she sees the elders in her family quarrel over the inheritance, she is bewildered and upset by their attitude. As Victoria, write a diary entry outlining the incident and your feelings. (150 words)

Answer: Students do yourself.

Speaking Task

10. Grandfather says, "It seems to me that neither of you has any cause to feel proud about the way you've treated me." While it is true that the daughters disregard modesty, decency and filial obligation, grandfather cannot be fully justified in practically disowning his family. Besides, Victoria loves him and he seems to have spared no thought for her feelings.

Divide yourselves into groups of four or five and discuss the statement: Grandfather is not entirely right in moving away from his daughters.

After the discussion, a representative from each group will present the views of her/his group to the class in about 3 minutes.

Answer:

Topic: Grandfather is not entirely right in moving away from his daughters.

View 1: Grandpa in the play 'The Dear Departed' was considered dead by family members. Instead of mourning, they got engaged in arguments over the belongings

of Mr Abel. The discovery that Mr Abel was 'hale and hearty' was a bolt from the blue. The old man was aghast to see them in mourning dresses and I think it was natural on his part. It did not take him long to realise their true motives. He played a joke that he would leave all his belongings to whoever he was living with when he died. In fact, that was just a trick to unveil their greedy nature. At that very moment, Abel made a shocking announcement that he would alter his will and get married to Mrs. Shorrock. But, if we look at the matter from a practical point of view, we will realise that Mr. Abel was not fully justified in breaking all ties with his family. He should have behaved in a mature way and spared some thoughts for her granddaughter Victoria who loved him too much. He could even try to make his daughter realize their mistake.