

## Chapter 2: Children at Work

## Comprehension Check

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**Question 1:** Velu stood on the platform but he felt “as if he was still on a moving train.” Why?

**Answer:** After a long train journey, Velu was too tired. Moreover, he was not able to sleep also. That is why Velu, while on the platform, was feeling as if he was still on a moving train.

**Question 2:** What made him feel miserable ?

**Answer:** Velu had run away from his village two days ago. He had not eaten anything except some peanuts and a piece of jaggery for two days. The journey also was too tiring and restless. All this made Velu feel miserable.

**Question 3:** (i) Velu travelled without a ticket. Why ?  
(ii) How did he escape the ticket collector’s attention ?

**Answer:**

(i) Velu had run away from his village without money. That is why he had to travel without a ticket.

(ii) Velu was in an unreserved compartment. Luckily, the ticket collector did not come to the unreserved compartment. That is how he escaped the ticket collector’s attention.

**Question 4:** Why had Velu run away from home ?

**Answer:** He had run away from home because of the harsh attitude of his drunkard father. He could not tolerate any more the merciless beating of his father. His father would snatch away all the money Velu and his sisters earned. He would spend this money on drink.

**Question 5:** Why did he decide to follow the ‘strange’ girl ?

**Answer:** Velu had come to Chennai for the first time. He was feeling miserable and hungry. He had no idea where to go. That is why he decided to follow her.

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**Question 1:** Can Velu read Tamil and English ? How do you know ?

**Answer:** Velu could read Tamil. But he could not read English. We came to know about it when he was looking at the huge signboards. He could not read them because they were in English. However, he read signs which were in Tamil, like that of the ‘Central Jail.’

**Question 2:**

“If you are not careful, you will soon be counting bars there,” the girl said.

(i) What is she referring to ?

(ii) What does she mean when she says “If you are not careful.....”? (She says something a little later which means the same. Find that sentence.)

**Answer:**

(i) The girl said these words while pointing at the Central Jail. Thus she is referring to the jail in this context.

(ii) She means to say that if Velu won’t be careful or vigilant enough, he could be behind the bars. After sometime she says, “You don’t have to do anything. Just don’t get caught, that’s all.”

**Question 3:** (i) Where did the girl lead Velu to ?

(ii) What did they get to eat ?

**Answer:** (i) The girl led Velu to a big garbage bin behind the hall.

(ii) They got a banana and a vada to eat.

**Question 4:** What work did she do ? Think of a one-word answer.

**Answer:** Ragpicker.

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**Question 1:** (i) What material are the 'strange' huts made out of ?

(ii) Why does Velu find them strange ?

**Answer:** (i) The 'strange' huts where Jaya lived were made out of metal sheets, tyres, bricks, wood and plastic.

(ii) Velu found the huts 'strange' because in his village the houses were made of mud and palm leaves.

**Question 2:** What sort of things did Jaya and children like to collect and what did they do with those things ?

**Answer:** They would collect things like paper, plastic and glass, etc. They would sell these things to Jaggu in J. in Bazaar.

**Question 3:** Is Velu happy or unhappy to find work? Give a reason for your answer.

**Answer:** It is obvious in the story that Velu is not happy to do the job of a ragpicker. He just wants to do it, until he finds a better job.

## **Exercise**

Discuss the following questions in small groups. Write their answers afterwards.

**Question 1:** Is Velu a smart boy? Which instances in the text show that he is or isn't?

**Answer:** After reading this moving story we find that Velu is more or less a smart boy. He is just eleven years old. But still he runs away from his village, without even having money. For two days he ate nothing except some peanuts and a piece of jaggery. He walked upto Kanur from his village for most of the first day. Then he himself catches the train to Chennai and travels without ticket successfully upto Chennai. At Chennai platform he meets Jaya, a ragpicker. He is smart enough to decide to do the work of a ragpicker until one day he finds a better job.

**Question 2:** Do you think Jaya is a brave and sensitive child with a sense of humour? Find instances of her courage, kind nature and humour in the text.

**Answer:** Yes, of course, we find Jaya a courageous, kind-hearted and a child who has a sense of humour. Thinking that Velu seems to run away from home, she sympathises with him. She helps him to have some food and see that he earns some money by being a ragpick er. While crossing the road full of traffic, Velu hesitated and did so reluctantly. Jaya dragged him to the other side.

She warned him that if he would stand in the middle of the road like that he will "be Chutney". She also shows sense of humour when Velu is reluctant to do the work of a ragpicker. She calls him a "big hero" who just stands there "posing". The way she faces the hardships of life in a smiling way shows her courage and strong will.

**Question 3:** What one throws away as waste may be valuable to others. Do you find this sentence meaningful in the context of this story?

**Answer:** The referred sentence is quite meaningful with reference to the story 'Children at Work'. Jaya, in story, is a ragpicker who collects paper, plastic goods and glass, etc. from various garbage bins. She makes a livelihood by selling these things, which are thrown by people as waste. Thus what are thrown away as waste may be valuable to others like Jaya and many ragpickers.