

Chapter 5: The Snake and the Mirror

Thinking about the Text

I. Discuss in pairs and answer each question below in a short paragraph

Question 1:

“The sound was a familiar one.” What sound did the doctor hear? What did he think it was? How many times did he hear it? (Find the places in the text.) When and why did the sounds stop?

Answer:

The doctor heard the sound of rats. The sound was a familiar one. He heard this sound four times. The phrases are ‘Again I heard that sound from above’, ‘Again came that noise from above’, ‘Suddenly there came a dull thud as if a rubber tube has fallen’. The sounds stopped after the appearance of the snake.

Question 2:

What two “important” and “earth-shaking” decisions did the doctor take while he was looking into the mirror?

Answer:

The doctor took the following two ‘important’ and ‘earth shaking’ decisions:

- (a) He would shave daily and grow a thin moustache to look more handsome.
- (b) He would always keep that attractive smile on his face.

Question 3:

“I looked into the mirror and smiled,” says the doctor. A little later he says, “I forgot my danger and smiled feebly at myself.” What is the doctor’s opinion about himself when (i) he first smiles, and (ii) he smiles again? In what way do his thoughts change in between, and why?

Answer:

The doctor thought that he had a good smile when he first smiled. But when he smiled a little later, he laughed at his destiny. His life was in danger. His thoughts got changed because of the snake. He was quite near to death.

II. This story about a frightening incident is narrated in a humorous way. What makes it humorous?

(Think of the contrasts it presents between dreams and reality. Some of them are listed below).

Write short paragraphs on each of these to get your answer.

Question 1:

1. The kind of person the doctor is (money, possessions)
2. The kind of person he wants to be (appearance, ambition)

Answer:

1. The doctor is a poor man. He does not have much money. His house has no electricity. It is a small rented room which has many rats. He has about sixty rupees in his suitcase. Along with some shirts and dhotis, he also possesses one solitary black coat.
2. He wants to be a handsome person. So he decides to shave daily and grow a thin moustache. He also wishes to accumulate wealth.

Question 2:

1. The person he wants to marry

2. The person he actually marries

Answer:

1. He intends to marry a woman doctor who has plenty of money and a good medical practice. He wishes to have a fat wife so that she cannot run after him and catch him when he would make a mistake.
2. The person he actually marries is a thin reedy person with the gift of a sprinter.

Question 3:

1. His thoughts when he looks into the mirror
2. His thoughts when the snake is coiled around his arm

Answer:

1. He thinks that he should look smart. So he decides to shave daily and retain his smile. He is happy and contented when he looks into the mirror.
2. When the snake coiled around his left arm above the elbow, he kept sitting there holding his breath. He became motionless. He was afraid of the snake.

Thinking about language

Question I:

Here are some sentences from the text. Say which of them tell you, that the author:

(a) was afraid of the snake, (b) was proud of his appearance, (c) had a sense of humour, (d) was no longer afraid of the snake.

1. I was turned to stone.
2. I was no mere image cut in granite.
3. The arm was beginning to be drained of strength.
4. I tried in my imagination to write in bright letters outside my little heart the words, 'O God'.
5. I didn't tremble. I didn't cry out.
6. I looked into the mirror and smiled. It was an attractive smile.
7. I was suddenly a man of flesh and blood.
8. I was after all a bachelor, and a doctor too on top of it!
9. The fellow had such a sense of cleanliness ... ! The rascal could have taken it and used it after washing it with soap and water.
10. Was it trying to make an important decision about growing a moustache or using eye shadow and mascara or wearing a vermilion spot on its forehead.

Answers:

- The sentences (1), (3), (4), (5) tell that the author - (a) was afraid of the snake.
- The sentences (6) and (8) tell that he - (b) was proud of his appearance.
- The sentences (9) and (10) tell that - (c) he had a sense of humour.
- The sentences (2) and (7) tell that - (d) he was no longer afraid of the snake.

Question II:

Expressions used to show fear

Can you find the expressions in the story that tell you that the author was frightened? Read the story and complete the following sentences.

1. I was turned
2. I sat there holding
3. In the light of the lamp I sat there like

Answers:

1. I was turned to stone.
2. I sat there holding my breath.
3. In the light of the lamp I sat there like a stone image in the flesh.

Question III:

In the sentences given below some words and expressions are italicised. They variously mean that one

- is very frightened.

- is too scared to move.
- is frightened by something that happens suddenly.
- makes another feel frightened.

Match the meanings with the words/ expressions in italics, and write the appropriate meaning next to the sentence. The first one has been done for you.

1. I knew a man was following me, I was *scared out of my wits*. [very frightened]
2. I *got a fright* when I realised how close I was to the cliff edge.
3. He *nearly jumped out of his skin* when he saw the bull coming towards him.
4. You really *gave me a fright* when you crept up behind me like that.
5. Wait until I tell his story—it will *make your hair stand on end*.
6. *Paralysed with fear*, the boy faced his abductors.
7. The boy hid behind the door, *not moving a muscle*.

Answers:

1. I knew a man was following me, I was *scared out of my wits*. [very frightened]
2. I *got a fright* when I realised how close I was to the cliff edge. [too scared to move].
3. He *nearly jumped out of his skin* when he saw the bull coming towards him. [frightened by something that happens suddenly]
4. You really *gave me a fright* when you crept up behind me like that. [made someone feel frightened]
5. Wait until I tell his story—it will *make your hair stand on end*. [very frightened]
6. *Paralysed with fear*, the boy faced his abductors. [too scared to move]
7. The boy hid behind the door, *not moving a muscle*. [too scared to move]

Question IV:

Report these questions, using if/whether or why/when/where/how/which/what. Remember the italicised verbs change into the past tense.

1. Meena asked her friend, “*Do you think* your teacher will come today?”
2. David asked his colleague, “Where *will* you go this summer?”
3. He asked the little boy, “Why *are* you studying English?”
4. She asked me, “When *are* we going to leave?”
5. Pran asked me, “*Have* you finished reading the newspaper?”
6. Seema asked her, “How long *have* you lived here?”
7. Sheila asked the children, “*Are* you ready to do the work?”

Answers:

1. Meena asked her friend if he (she) thought his (her) teacher would come that day.
2. David asked his colleague where he would go that summer.
3. He asked the little boy why he was studying English.
4. She asked me when they were going to leave.
5. Pran asked me if I had finished reading the newspaper.
6. Seema asked her how long she had lived there.
7. Sheila asked the children if they were ready to do the work.

Speaking

Using some of the expressions given above in exercise III, talk about an incident when you were very scared. You may have a competition to decide whose story was the most frightening.

Answer:

For self-attempt.

Dictation

The following paragraph is about the Indian Cobra. Read it twice and close your book. Your teacher will then dictate the paragraph to you. Write it down with appropriate punctuation marks.

Answer:

The Indian cobra is the common name for members of the family of venomous snakes, known for their intimidating looks and deadly bite. Cobras are recognized by the heads that they flare when angry or disturbed; the heads are created by the extension of the ribs behind the cobra's heads. Obviously, the best prevention is to avoid getting bitten. This is facilitated by the fact that humans are not the natural prey of any venomous snake. We are a bit large for them to swallow whole and they have no means of chopping us up into bite-size pieces. Nearly all snakebites in humans are the result of a snake defending itself when it feels threatened. In general snakes are shy and will simply leave if you give them a chance.

Writing

Question 1:

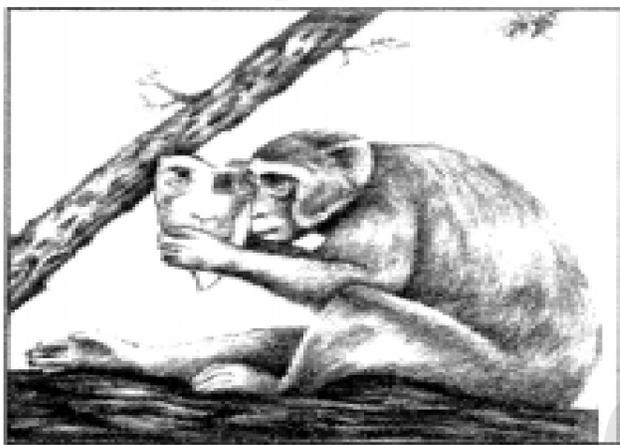
Try to rewrite the story without its humour, merely as a frightening incident. What details or parts of the story would you leave out?

Answer:

For self-attempt.

Question 2:

Read the description given alongside this sketch from a photograph in a newspaper (Times of India, 4 September 1999). Make up a story about what the monkey is thinking, or why it is looking into a mirror. Write a paragraph about it.



The fairest of them all

A monkey preens itself using a piece of mirror, in the Delhi ridge.

(‘To preen oneself’ means to spend a lot of time making oneself look attractive, and then admiring one’s appearance. The word is used in disapproval.)

Answer:

It was a sunny day. A monkey was walking in the garden. Fortunately, he came to the corner of the garden and found a piece of mirror. The monkey started looking in the mirror. First of all, he looked his face in the mirror and was very happy. He thought that God has given him a human face. Again, he looked his hands and fingers in the mirror. He was very proud because he realised that his hands were long and he could hold things easily. At last, he decided to look his body in the mirror. This time he was not so much happy because it was full of hair. The monkey was sad and his hands started trembling. Unfortunately, the mirror fell down from his hand and broke into several pieces. When he tried to look his face in the pieces of mirror, he saw his cut faces. This time he became angry and left the place.

Translation

Here are two translations of the opening paragraphs of a novel by the Japanese writer, Haruki Murakami. Read them and answer the questions given below :

A	B
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A	B
<p>When the phone rang I was in the kitchen, boiling a potful of spaghetti and whistling along with FM broadcast of the overture to Rossini's The Thieving Magpie, which has to be the perfect music for cooking pasta.</p> <p>I wanted to ignore the phone, not only because the spaghetti was nearly done, but because Claudio Abbado was bringing the London Symphony to its musical climax.</p>	<p>I'm in the kitchen cooking spaghetti when the woman calls. Another moment until the spaghetti is done ; there I am, whistling the prelude to Rossini's La Gazza Ladra along with the FM radio. Perfect spaghetti cooking music!</p> <p>I hear the telephone ring but tell myself, Ignore it. Let the spaghetti finish cooking. It's almost done, and besides, Claudio Abbado and the London Symphony Orchestra are coming to a crescendo.</p>

Compare the two translations on the basis of the following points :

- the tense of narration (past and present tense)
- short, incomplete sentences
- sentence length

Which of these translations do you like? Give reasons for your choice.

Answer:

- The tense of narration (past and present tense)

Opinion: In Column A, sentences are written in the past tense whereas in Column B, they are written in the present tense.

- Short, incomplete sentences Opinion: In Column B short sentences are used. They are framed in the present tense.
- Sentence length

Opinion : The Column B has short sentences. They are simple and easily comprehensible. Besides, they are framed in the present tense.

Reason : I like the paragraph marked as B. The sentences are framed in the present tense. They give out clear-cut ideas in its simple form. We can easily remember the facts expressed in the present tense.