

## Grade VIII

### Lesson 1. The Best Christmas Present in the World

PROSE

#### Summary of the chapter

##### **The Narrator Finds a Roll-top Desk.**

The Narrator had been wanting to buy a roll-top desk for a very long time. Finding it expensive, he was unable to do so. Finally, he finds one in a junk shop in Bridport. The desk was a very old early 19th century make and it was made of oak. The junk shopkeeper was selling it at a low price as the desk was in a bad condition. Its roll-top was broken into a number of pieces and it also had many burn marks. It was probably recovered from Mrs Macpherson's house after it caught fire.

##### **The Contents of the Secret Drawer and the Narrator Reads the Letter.**

While repairing the desk and opening one of its drawers that had got stuck, the narrator comes across a secret drawer. In the secret drawer, the narrator finds a small box. On top of the box there was a note written and stuck with the help of a cello tape—"Jim's last letter, received on 25th January, 1915. To be buried with me when the time comes." The note was written in a shaky handwriting, which meant that it was written by old Mrs Macpherson and was not written long back.

Despite knowing that it is morally wrong to read someone else's letter, the narrator begins reading it because he couldn't suppress his curiosity. The narrator gets to know from the envelope that the letter was for Mrs Macpherson. The letter was written on 26th December, 1914, a day after Christmas by Mrs Macpherson's husband. Mrs Macpherson's husband was away to fight in the war against Germans.

##### **Jim Macpherson Recalls about Christmas Celebration with Germans**

Jim was happy to share with his wife the details of the previous day. Christmas morning. He describes how on the battlefield, he experienced something quite unexpected. Jim sees the Fritz waving a white flag and cheerfully crying out, "Happy Christmas". Jim was quite

surprised and he thought it to be some dirty trick of the Germans and therefore ordered his soldiers to be alert and "keep your heads down".

### **The Conversation between Jim Macpherson and Hans Wolf Leads to Football Match**

The German officer greeted Jim. His name was Hans Wolf and soon both were talking to each other about their life, their hobbies and had various such other small talks. Hans Wolf told Jim that he was from Dusseldorf and used to play cello in the orchestra. Jim, likewise, informed him that he was a school teacher from Dorset. Jim figured out that Hans knew a lot about Dorset, though he had never been to that place.

After some time both the camps arranged themselves into teams to play football. It was difficult to imagine that these were war soldiers and enemies playing foot ball. Hans Wolf commented that a game or a sport is a much better way of resolving conflicts than going on a war. "I think this is how we should resolve this war. A football match. No one dies in a football match. No children are orphaned. No wives become widows." Jim replied that he preferred cricket to football, but both agreed that war was detestable and hateful to both of them, rather to all of them.

### **Time to Return to their War Camps**

As the match came to an end, the time to go back to their camps and place themselves again as enemies had come. The troops on both the sides were sad to return and wished each other well with a hope that the war would end soon and they would go back to their families. Even after the soldiers returned to their respective camps, they continued to cheer each other with Christmas carols, like 'Silent Night' and 'While Shepherds Watched'.

### **The Narrator Meets Mrs Macpherson**

Jim ends the letter on a note that before the next Christmas, the war would long be over and he would return home to be re-united with his wife, Connie.

Having finished reading the letter, the narrator kept thinking about the letter and its contents and the next morning he decides to go and meet Mrs Macpherson. The narrator goes to her house and there he only finds the remains of a burnt down house. After talking to the neighbours, the narrator goes to the nursing home where Mrs Macpherson was admitted. There he finds her sitting on a wheelchair. She was very old, hundred and one year old. She was

blankly staring out of the window. The narrator carried with him the small tin box in which he had found the letter and handed it over to Mrs Macpherson.

### **Mrs Macpherson Mistakenly Believes the Narrator to be Her Husband**

Mrs Macpherson on seeing the box, looks up to see the stranger and mistakenly assumes the narrator to be her husband, Jim. She remembers the promise Jim had made years ago, of returning back home on Christmas and rejoices thinking that finally Jim kept his promise and has come back to her. She calls his return "the best Christmas present in the world". She, then, asks him to read out the letter to her in his own voice for she had been missing his voice.

#### **NCERT Corner**

#### **CHECK 1**

##### **1. What did the author find in a junk shop?**

The author found an old roll-top desk in a junk shop in Bridport. It was made in early 19th century of oak wood. Since, it was not in a good condition, the junk shopkeeper was selling it at a low price.

##### **2. What did he find in a secret drawer? Who do you think had put it in there?**

In the secret drawer, the narrator found a small black tin box that contained a letter. On the box a note said that this letter was Jim's last letter, received on 25th January, 1915. The envelope of the letter addresses

Mrs Macpherson as the receiver of the letter; therefore it must be Mr Macpherson who kept the letter in that secret drawer.

#### **CHECK 2**

##### **1. Who had written the letter, to whom and when?**

Jim had written the letter to his wife, Connie, When he was away on the war front fighting the war against the Germans. The letter was written a day after Christmas i.e. on 26th December, 1914. It reached Mrs Macpherson on 25th January, 1915.

**2. Why was the letter written\_\_\_\_\_what was the Wonderful thing that had happened?**

Jim wrote this letter to his wife, Connie to describe certain unusual events that took place on the previous day. In the midst of the war, the British and the German soldiers had come together to celebrate Christmas.

They celebrated the day as the best of friends would, sharing their food and drinks and cake. It was unbelievable for Jim and perhaps for others too to think of enemies setting aside their hatred for each other and making peace. Jim shared with Connie all possible details of the day, for he was too happy.

**3. What jobs did Hans Wolf and Jim Macpherson have when they were not soldiers?**

Hans Wolf played the cello in an orchestra. He had come from Dusseldorf Jim Macpherson, on the other hand, was a school teacher in Dorset.

**4. Had Hans Wolf ever been to Dorset? Why did he say he knew it?**

Hans Wolf had never been to Dorset. Despite that he knew fairly well about the place. He had read a lot about Dorset and England in English books. He also spoke good English. Jim was surprised to know this.

**5. Do you think Jim Macpherson came back from the war? How do you know this?**

Jim Macpherson did not come back from the war. Jim wrote the letter to Connie in the year 1914 and because he was a soldier/an officer, he must have been very young then. The story ends with old.

Mrs Macpherson aged hundred and one, still waiting for Jim's return. Clearly many decades have passed and contrary to his promise, Jim did not come back home. He was probably dead.

**CHECK 3**

**1. Why did the author go to Bridport?**

The author went to Bridport to meet Connie and return her the letter. The tin box that contained the letter had Connie's message pasted upon it," To be buried with me when the time comes."

**2. How old was Mrs Macpherson now? Where was she?**

Old Mrs Macpherson was now a hundred and one years old. She was admitted to Burlington House Nursing Home after her house had caught fire.

## CHECK 4

### 1. Who did Connie Macpherson think her visitor was?

The narrator on seeing Connie called out her name and handed over the tin box and the letter to her. On seeing the letter, Connie began stroking the letter and thought the visitor to be her husband, who had finally returned from the war.

### 2. Which sentence in the text shows that the visitor did not try to hide his identity?

On meeting Connie, the visitor tried to explain to her how he had found the desk, the secret drawer and the letter, "I explained about the desk, about how I had found it, but I don't think she was listening."

## Working with the Text

### 1. For how long do you think Connie had kept Jim's letter? Give reasons for your answer.

Connie must have kept her husband's letter for a very long time as she used to read it very often. Jim was a British officer fighting in the war against the Germans. The soldiers in armies are usually young men. This tells us that Connie must also have been a young lady when she received her husband's letter on 25th January, 1915.

When we meet Mrs Macpherson in the Burlington House Nursing Home, She is an old lady, aged hundred and one. The time lapse clearly indicates that Connie must have preserved Jim's letter for more than 70 years.

### 2. Why do you think the desk had been sold and when?

The narrator purchased the desk from a junk shop in perhaps the late 20th century. The desk was an old, early 19th century desk made of oak and was supposed to be very expensive.

However, the current state of the desk was very bad, for it was recovered from Mrs Macpherson's house after it caught fire. The remains of the household articles must have been sold after Mrs Macpherson was taken to the nursing home.

### 3. Why do Jim and Hans think that games or sports are good way of resolving conflicts? Do you agree?

Jim and Hans thought that games or sports are good ways of resolving conflicts than going to war because war only leads to death and destruction. No matter which camp wins the war, loss of life is common to both the armies, families too long are ruined and children are

orphaned and wives are widowed. I completely agree with this line of thought as no one dies during matches. Peace constructs the society whereas war destroys it.

**4. Do you think the soldiers of the two armies are like each other or different from each other? Find evidence from the story to support your answer.**

There is enough evidence in the story to prove that the soldiers of both the armies are no different from each other. The soldiers from both the sides love the idea of peace and harmony. They lose no time in coming together to celebrate Christmas with each other, forgetting that they are each other's enemies. They bring their drinks, sausage and cakes and unite in perfect brotherhood. Also, the soldiers on both the sides become sad again when they were to again return to their trenches and continue with the war. Jim Macpherson also regretted that he was not the first one to initiate the peace truce.

**5. Mention the various ways in which the British and the German soldiers become friends and find things in common at Christmas.**

When the German soldiers waved the white flag and called out 'Merry Christmas' from across the no man's land, the British soldiers with a similar spirit replied, 'same to you'. The soldiers on both sides gelled together over alcohol, sausages and cakes that they brought together to make merry on Christmas.

They also played foot ball and other games and even after having returned to their trenches, continued singing Christmas carols following each other in perfect harmony.

**6. What is Connie's Christmas present? Why is, "the best Christmas present in the world"?**

The letter that Jim wrote to Connie informed her of her husband's happy state of mind, a rarity during the times of war. In the letter, Jim also promised Connie that he would be home before the next Christmas. Jim's letter carried with it a message of hope. Recovery of the letter despite the fact that her house had caught fire and mistakenly assuming the stranger, who brought with him the letter to be her husband, "the best Christmas present" for Connie was the fulfilment of her hopes on a Christmas day, the return of the letter and her husband, Jim.

**7. Do you think the title of this story is suitable for it? Can you think of any other title(s)?**

According to me, the title of the story, "The Best Christmas Present in the World" is quite apt, as all the events in story revolve around Christmas. Each of the primary characters

receives a present on the day of Christmas. Jim Macpherson and Hans Wolf rejoice in the merriment of Christmas along with their armies. Away from home and its gaiety they nonetheless get to be happy, even though temporarily. The narrator manages to buy the desk, a desk he had been longing to buy but was too expensive for him. Around Christmas, he manages to acquire a desk that is in bad condition and therefore, relatively cheaper. Connie Macpherson recovers her special letter yet again and believes that on Christmas her husband has finally returned to her, as he had promised years ago in the letter.

### Working with Language

#### 1. Look at these sentences from the story.

I spotted it in a junk shop in Bridport... The man said it was made in the early 19th century... this one was in a bad condition...

The italicised verbs are in the past tense. They tell us what happened in the past, before now.

#### (i) Read the passage below and underline the verbs in the past tense.

A man got on the train and sat down. The compartment was empty except for one lady. She took her gloves off. A few hours later the police arrested the man. They held him for 24 hours and then freed him.

A man got on the train and sat down. The compartment was empty except for one lady. She took her gloves off. A few hours later the police arrested the man. They held him for 24 hours and then freed him.

Now look at these sentences.

The veneer had lifted almost everywhere. Both fire and water had taken their toll on this desk.

Notice the verb forms had lifted, had taken (their toll). The author found and bought the desk in the past. The desk was damaged before the author found it and bought it.

Fire and water had damaged the desk before the author found it and bought it.

We use verb forms like had damaged for an event in the 'earlier past'. If there are two events in the past, we use the 'had ...' form for the event that occurred first in the past.

We also use the past perfect tense to show that something was wished for or expected before a particular time in the past. e.g. I had always wanted one. . .

Discuss with your partner the different in meaning in the sentences below. When I reached the station, the train left. When I reached the station, the train had left.

**(ii) Fill in the blanks using the correct form of the verbs in brackets.**

My little sister is very naughty. When she \_\_\_\_\_ (Come) back from school yesterday, she had \_\_\_\_\_ (tear) her dress. We \_\_\_\_\_ (ask) her how it had \_\_\_\_\_ (happen). She \_\_\_\_\_ (say) she \_\_\_\_\_ (have) \_\_\_\_\_ (quarrel) with a boy. She \_\_\_\_\_ (have) \_\_\_\_\_ (beat) him in a race and he \_\_\_\_\_ (have) \_\_\_\_\_ (tell) the teacher and so he \_\_\_\_\_ (have) \_\_\_\_\_ (chase) her and she \_\_\_\_\_ (have) \_\_\_\_\_ (fall) down and \_\_\_\_\_ (have) \_\_\_\_\_ (tear) her dress.

My little sister is very naughty. When she came back from school yesterday, she had torn her dress. We asked her how it had happened. She said she had quarreled with a boy. She had beaten him in a race and he had tried to push her, She had told the teacher and so he had chased her and she had fallen down and had torn her dress.

**(iii) Underline the verbs and arrange them in two columns, Past and Earlier Past.**

(a) My friends set out to see the caves in the next town, but I stayed at home, because I had seen them already.

(b) When they arrived at the station, their train had left. They came back home, but by that time I had gone out to see a movie.

(c) So they sat outside and ate the lunch I had packed for them.

(d) By the time I returned, they had fallen asleep.

Past	Earlier Past

(a) My friends set out to see the caves in the next town, but I stayed at home, because I had seen them already.

(b) When they arrived at the station, their train had left. They came back home, but by that time I had gone out to see a movie.

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(d) By the time I returned, they had fallen asleep.

Past	Earlier Past
Stayed	had seen
Arrived	had left
Came	had gone
Sat, ate	had packed
Returned	had fallen

## 2. Dictionary Work

By the end of the journey, we had run out of drinking water.

Look at the verb run out of in this sentence. It is a phrasal verb: it has two parts, a verb and a preposition or an adverb.

Phrasal verbs often have meanings that are different from the meanings of their parts. Find these phrasal verbs in the story.

**burn out, lit up. Looked on, run out, keep out**

**Write down the sentences in which they occur. Consult a dictionary and write down the meaning that you think matches the meaning of the phrasal verb in the sentences.**

**(i) Burn out** completely burnt House number 12 turned out to be nothing but a **burned-out** shell.

**(ii) Lit up** glow

That was the moment her eyes **lit up** with recognition and her face became suffused with a sudden glow of happiness.

**(iii) Looked on** watched

Hans Wolf and I **looked on** and cheered, clapping our hands and stamping our feet.

**(iv) Run out** finished

The time came and all too soon, when the game was finished, the schnapps and the rum and the sausage had long since **run out** and we knew it was all over.

**(v) Keep out** Prevent from entering Hans, Wolf and I looked on and cheered clapping our hands and stamping our feet, to **keep out** the cold as much as anything.

### 3. Noun phrase

Read the following sentence.

I took out a small black tin box.

- The phrase in italics is a noun phrase.
- It has the noun box as the head word and three adjectives preceding it.
- Notice the order in which the adjectives occur. size (small), colour (black) and material (tin) of which it is made

We rarely use more than four adjectives before a noun and there is no rigid order in which they are used, though there is a preferred order of modifiers/adjectives in a noun phrase, as given below.

Determiner	Modifier1 (opinion, feeling)	Modifier2 (size, shape, age)	Modifier3 (colour)	Modifier4 (material)	Head Word
A/an/the	nice/lazy/ Beautiful	tall/round/ old/young	red/white/ light/dark	silk/cotton woollen	woman/man/ table/chair

4. The table below contains a list of nouns and some adjectives. Use as many adjectives as you can to describe each noun. You might come up with some funny descriptions!

Nouns	Adjectives
elephant	Circular, stripped, enormous,
face	multicoloured, round, cheerful, wild, blue
building	red, chubby, large, medium-sized, cold
water	

Nouns	Adjectives
elephant	enormous, multicoloured
face	stripped, round, cheerful, red, chubby sized
building	large, medium-sized, multicoloured
water	blue, cold

## Speaking

### 1. In groups discuss whether wars are a good way to end conflicts between countries.

**Then present your arguments to the whole class.**

War is definitely not a good way of resolving conflicts between countries. Wars only lead to destruction and devastation. It leads to loss of both human life and property.

Human loss war is responsible for the death of trained, skilled, zealous and patriotic soldiers. It is a pity that people who are meant to protect us have to lose their life. The war hero usually dies on the battlefield and many times when he returns, he has injuries that are of a lifelong nature. This suffering is also extended to his family members who constantly mourn his separation, death and sufferings. Children are orphaned, wives are widowed and parents lose their sons. War also affects civilians who fall prey to the war.

**Economic loss** A lot of money is spent by the government in maintaining armies. Also during war there is an increased expenditure on maintaining weapons and ammunition that are essential in combating the enemy. This money could be spent on welfare programmes, infrastructural developments and so on.

In a civilized society, discussions negotiations and peace treaties could be good alternatives to avoid war and live in a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere.

### 2. What kind of presents do you like and why? What are the things you keep in mind when you buy presents for others? Discuss with your partner.

Presents are usually tokens of love and blessings. It is good to receive them. One feels loved and pampered. I like receiving painting materials and books as presents. I use them to create paintings to decorate my home. While buying presents for others, there are two points to be kept in mind which are as follows:

(i) The preferences of the person for whom we are buying the present. It is good to keep aside our personal likes and think of what would be suitable had that person been buying something for himself/herself.

(ii) The efficacy or the worth of the present. Presents are also good ways of inculcating and encouraging good habits in others. For instance, gifting a book that could be read by people over a period of time and also be shared with others. It is also a good source of knowledge, Gifting a potted plant is another good method of improving our surroundings and environment

and aiming at creating cleaner and greener spaces around us. It is also good to buy and give presents to children at orphanages as they have no one who could give them this happiness.

### Writing

**1. Imagine that you are Jim. You have returned to your town after the war. In your diary record how you feel about the change you see and the events that occur in your town. You could begin like this, 25th December, 1919, its Christmas today, but the town looks.....**

Ans: 25<sup>th</sup> December, 1919.

The war is over and I have returned home and today is Christmas, but Christmas didn't have its usual cheer and gaiety. Hardly any people can be seen on the streets dancing, singing, merry making. It's been more than a month since the war was over, but people are still terrorised and are hesitant in stepping out. The joy of Christmas is incomplete without a community celebration.

The empty streets are not the same either. The buildings, the parks, the fountains have been reduced to debris. The purity of the air has been reduced to debris. The purity of the air has been replaced by the smell of blood and fire. I just cannot connect with this town. I get lost while wandering, because all those familiar landmarks have been reduced to heaps of garbage. I feel so sad.

Connie is sad too. She is traumatized and gets lost in the web of her thoughts. I wish this war had never happened. How is wish that last Christmas celebrations should not have been further followed by war. Things could have been different today. Things could have been normal today. Jim

Or

**Suppose you are the visitor. You are in a dilemma. You don't know whether to disclose your identity and disappoint the old lady or let her believe that her dear Jim has come back. Write a letter to a friend highlighting your anxiety, fears and feelings.**

Ans:

House No.10,

XYZ Street,

Burlington.

25th December, 1990

**Dear Peter**

How have you been my friend? It's been a long time since we last met. I had come to Burlington for some work and have encountered a string of strange events. My thoughts are all muddled up. I am sharing with you my feelings, hoping you could help. The string of strange events started with my buying a roll-top desk. It was in bad condition, so I started working on its repair and while doing so I saw a secret drawer in it and it contained a letter.

The letter was written by Jim, an army officer, to his wife Connie, while he was away at the war with Germans. It was quite an old letter, dated 1914. Having read the letter I immediately knew how special and treasured this letter was. So, the next morning I thought of meeting Mrs Macpherson. With the help of the address indicated on the envelope, I reached there and got to know that their house had caught fire and Mrs Macpherson was now in a hospital. I went to see her in the hospital. She had turned so old and was sitting on a wheel chair. I tried explaining her how I had found it, but she had become lost in her thoughts and somehow she understood me to be Jim, her dead husband. She kissed my cheek, held my hands, asked me to talk to her and I animatedly did it all. I come back home after a little while, stuck up in my thoughts entirely as to what to do next. Should I tell her the truth and disappoint her? Or should I allow her to die peacefully thinking that finally her husband had returned to her? Dear friend please help me understand what should be the right course of action.

Yours truly

Tom

**2. Given below is the outline of a story, Construct the story using the outline.**

A young, newly married doctor \_\_\_\_\_ freedom fighter \_\_\_\_\_ exiled to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands by the British \_\_\_\_\_ infamous \_\_\_\_\_ Cellular Jail \_\_\_\_\_ prisoners tortured \_\_\_\_\_ revolt by inmates \_\_\_\_\_ doctor hanged \_\_\_\_\_ wife waits for this return \_\_\_\_\_ becomes old \_\_\_\_\_ continues to wait with hope and faith.

A young newly married doctor, who was also a freedom fighter, a true patriot, was detained a day after his marriage and exiled to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands by the British

to the infamous Cellular Jail. All this happened so suddenly and discreetly that nobody got to know what had happened. In the jail the prisoners were tortured and beaten up.

They were not allowed to write letters to their relatives. They were expected to silently endure all this, but one fine day there was a revolt by the inmates. They decided to get together and protest. The authorities did not know how to handle it and to suppress the revolt many inmates were hanged to death. The doctor too was hanged. His wife didn't get the news of this death. She kept waiting for home to return. Endlessly waiting, she became old, but her husband never returned. Despite that, she continues to wait with hope and faith.

## Chapter Practice

### Very Short Answer Type Questions

**1. What jobs did Hans Wolf and Jim Macpherson have when they were not soldiers?**

Hans Wolf played cello in the orchestra and Jim Macpherson was a school teacher in Dorset.

**2. Which war does the story talk about?**

The story alludes to the First World War, 1914-1918

**3. Which was Hans Wolf's favorite book?**

Hans Wolf's favorite book was 'Thomas Hardy's Far' from the Madding Crowd.

**4. Why Mrs Macpherson continued using candles for light?**

Mrs Macpherson used to burn candles because she thought that electricity was expensive.

**5. Who all were there in Hans Wolf's family?**

Hans Wolf had a wife and a son. His son was only 6 months old.

**6. What did the old man, Mrs Macpherson's neighbour tell the narrator about her?**

The old man told the narrator that Mrs Macpherson was a lovely lady, but also muddle-headed because of her age.

**7. What was the colour of the box that contained Jim's letter?**

It was small black coloured tin box

**8. What did the matron offer to the narrator?**

The Matron offered a mince pie to the narrator.

## 9. Which game did Jim prefer to play, as a solution to war?

Jim Thought it was better to resolve the war by playing cricket. Hans Wolf on the other hand wished to do the same through a foot ball match.

### Short Answer Type Questions

#### 1. What was Jim ashamed of?

Jim was ashamed of the fact that he was not the first one to initiate a peace truce between the soldiers of the two armies. This initiative was taken by the Germans. He was also ashamed because he had mistakenly been suspicious of the Germans, while they waved a white flag to indicate peace. He thought it to be one of their dirty tricks.

#### 2. Why was the narrator unable to sleep, having read Jim's letter to Connie?

The narrator could not sleep the whole night after having read Jim's letter addressed to Connie because of the special status that the letter held in Connie's life. The note on the tin box that contained the letter had on it old Mrs Macpherson's message, "To be buried with me when I die." This forced him to think of Connie and the letter and also of a way to return it to her.

#### 3. Describe the hall to which the matron took the narrator to meet Mrs Macpherson.

The matron very happily and willingly took the narrator to a conservatory, which had cane chairs and lots of plants. In the room, old Mrs Macpherson was seated all by herself for she had no relatives and therefore no one came to meet her. The matron was happy that finally somebody had come to meet Mrs Macpherson.

#### 4. Why did old Mrs Macpherson become happy when she met the narrator?

Old Mrs Macpherson's face suffused with a sudden glow of happiness as she met the narrator. First, she saw the tin box that contained Jim's last letter and was happy to get it back. She therefore began to gently stroke the letter. She then also mistakenly assumed the narrator to be her husband, Jim and was happy to see him return.

#### 5. How did Mrs Macpherson's house catch fire?

Mrs Macpherson didn't accustom herself to use electricity. She thought that electricity was very expensive. And, therefore, she continued to burn candles for light. Probably the burning candles were a reason behind the house catching fire. Also Mrs Macpherson was now very old and it was difficult for her to be careful and in full responsibility of such tasks.

## Long Answer Type Questions

### 1. Discuss the significance of the letter.

The letter becomes a symbol of hope. It's the only thread of communication between Connie and her husband, Jim. Jim promises in the letter that he will return home before Christmas, a promise that Connie hopes will be fulfilled, hoping her husband would return soon. For Connie, the letter becomes a substitute for her absent husband. She could feel her husband's presence whenever she read the letter; this made her read the letter over and over again. Years later, the letter also becomes Connie's "best Christmas present", for she mistakenly assumes that her husband has finally returned, bringing the letter with him.

### 2. What is the author conveying through this story?

The story ends on a note when old Mrs Macpherson mistakenly believes the narrator to be her war-returned hero, her husband who has fulfilled his promise. Her joy at being finally united with her husband could be looked upon as the final message of the author offering Connie's happiness as a replacement for the bitterness and emptiness of war. The story celebrates unions over loneliness, joy over sadness, celebration over destruction and peace over war. The author shares with his readers the true spirit of Christmas, love and hope and not destruction and death.

### 3. Elucidate the peculiar features of Jim's Christmas party.

Jim had the most peculiar Christmas party while he was at war. After the Germans initiated the peace truce, Jim saw the "khaki clad men" and men in "grey coats" mingling with each other. They were eating, drinking, laughing, smoking and having lots of fun. No one remembered that they were each other's enemies. They celebrate Christmas like friends. The events of this most unique Christmas party also emerge as better alternatives to war, a football or a cricket match as perceived by Jim and Hans Wolf.

## Value Based Questions

### 1. Should the narrator reveal his identity to old Mrs Macpherson or should he allow her to believe that he was her husband?

The narrator should not reveal his identity to old Mrs Macpherson. Mrs Macpherson was fairly young when her husband went to war. She spent her entire life waiting for her husband



to return to her. When the narrator meets Mrs Macpherson in the hospital, she was pretty old, hundred and one years old. Mrs Macpherson had no relatives in the last days of her life, this mistaken identity of her visitor could give her some happiness. It is true that the narrator would be telling a lie and cheating her, hiding his identity knowingly, but this would be worth Mrs Macpherson's endless wait.

## 2. Is war the only way of resolving conflicts between nations?

War is definitely not the only way of resolving conflicts. It is better to resolve conflicts through dialogue, discussion, peace treaties and so on. War never resolves conflicts, but rather aggravates them. Usually war is followed by another phase of cold war.

It also leads to state-sponsored terrorism and gives birth to many internal terrorist groups, which further leads to death, devastation and destruction.

### Extract Based Questions

#### Extract 1

**Directions (Q.Nos.1-6) Read the extract given below and answer the following questions.**

"Then they were calling out to us from across no man's land, "Happy Christmas, Tommy! Happy Christmas! "When we had got over the surprise, some of us shouted back, 'Same to you, Fritz! Same to you' thought that would be that. We all did. But then suddenly one of them was up there in his grey greatcoat and waving a white flag.

"Don't shoot lads!" someone shouted. And no one die. Then there was another Fritz up on the parapet, and another. "Keep your heads down," I told the men, "it's a trick. "But it wasn't.

#### 1. Who is the speaker of these lines?

- (a) Jim                      (b) Tommy                      (c) Hans Wolf                      (d) The narrator

**(a) Jim is the speaker of these lines**

#### 2. What is the 'trick that the speaker is talking about?

- (a) The weaving of flag by the Germans.                      (b) Germans wishing Christmas  
(c) Germans offering their food and drinks.                      (d) German's playing football

**(a) The weaving of flag by the Germans**

3. What was the speaker's reaction when he realises that it wasn't a trick?

- (a) He was ashamed
- (b) He gets very angry
- (c) He was embarrassed
- (d) He began to cry

**(a) Jim was ashamed of himself when he realized that it wasn't a trick.**

4. Why was everyone in a state of surprise?

Everyone was in a state of surprise because something of this sort had never happened earlier. They were "making peace in the middle of the war"

5. Discuss the uniqueness of this Christmas morning.

The uniqueness of the Christmas morning lay in their celebrating Christmas with their enemies. Both the German and British troops wasted no time in mingling with each other and celebrating the day.

6. Jim and Hans think of an alternate to war. What was it?

Jim and Hans both thought that a game or a sport is much better way of resolving conflicts than going on a war.

**Extract 2**

Directions (Q.Nos.1-6) Read the extract given below and answer the following questions.

"That was the moment her eyes lit up with recognition and her face became suffused with the sudden glow of happiness. I explained about the desk, about how I had found it, but I don't think she was listening. For a while she said nothing, but stroked the letter tenderly with her fingertips."

1. Who is the 'her' these lines?

- (a) The matron
- (b) Old Mrs Macpherson
- (c) Young Mrs Macpherson
- (d) The neighbour

**(b) The 'her' in the above line is old Mrs Macpherson.**

2. Why did she become happy?

- (a) Because it was Christmas
- (b) At the sight of the visitor
- (c) Because the matron had served apple pie
- (d) On seeing the decorations and the Christmas tree

**(b) She becomes happy at the sight of the visitor.**

### 3. Who did she think had come?

- (a) Jim            (b) Hans Wolf            (c) Her father            (d) Her brother

(a) She thinks that the visitor was her husband, Jim

### 4. Why did she keep stroking the letter?

She kept stroking the letter, for this letter was really precious for her.

This was her husband's last letter and his token of love that he had sent her while he was at war.

### 5. Does the narrator reveal his identity? If not, why?

On realizing that old Mrs Macpherson has mistaken the visitor to be her husband, the narrator is unable to reveal his identity.

Mrs Macpherson had become extremely happy, thinking it to be the return of her husband: the narrator did not wish to hurt her.

### 6. Why did old Mrs Macpherson misunderstand the identity of her visitor?

Old Mrs Macpherson misunderstood the identity of the visitor because she was too old and also not mentally alert. On seeing the letter, she simply assumed the visitor to be her husband.



**Before You Read**

### Do you know which events the dates below refer to?

(a) 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1776

(b) 17<sup>th</sup> December, 1903

(c) 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1945

(d) 30<sup>th</sup> January, 1948

(e) 12<sup>th</sup> April, 1961

(f) 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1969

(a) American declaration of independence.

(b) Wilbur and Orville Wright made the first flight

(c) An atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in Japan

(d) Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

(e) Yuri A Gagarin became the first human to orbit the Earth

(f) Neil Armstrong became the first human to see foot on the moon.