

Grade VIII - English

Lesson 4. The Last Bargain

Poetry

Soul of the Poem

The poem foregrounds the most important message of the poet, of which he was a champion himself, freedom. The poem opens with a man seeking work, but desires to keep his freedom.

Walking on the stone paved ground, in the morning, he first meets the king. The king offered to buy the man's labour with his power. The man, however, doesn't find much worth in the king's power and therefore refused to be hired.

Towards mid-day, having walked in the heat of the Sun, the man came across an old man. The old man carried a bag of money, he was very wealthy. He offered to buy the man's labour with his money. The man wasn't convinced to exchange his labours for money and moved on.

In the evening, as he was crossing the garden hedge, the man came across a fair maid. She offered to hire the man's services with her smile. The man couldn't find the lady's smile worth either. The Lady's smile became pale and melted into tears. She didn't get the man's company either.

Finally, the man reached the seashore. He saw a child playing with shells. The child made an offer too. His offer, though, was unique. He offered to buy the man's services with nothing. The man was overwhelmed with this offer for he was still a free man. He quickly accepted the offer and the bargain was struck.

Stanzawise Explanation of The Poem

Stanza 1

"Come and hire me," I cried, while in the
Morning I was walking on the stone-paved road.

Sword in hand the king came in his chariot.

He held my hand and said,

"I will hire you with my power,"

But his power counted for naught,
And he went away in his chariot.

Reference :

The abovelines have been taken from Rabindranath Tagore's composition, 'The Last Bargain'.

Context :

The poet showcases how power fails to buy the services of a certain ordinary man.

Explanation :

The poem opens with a man crying in the morning to be hired by someone, "Come and hire me." While he was walking on a stone-paved road looking for someone to hire his services, he came across the king who was coming in his chariot.

The king immediately took the man's hand in his hand and offered to buy his services with his power. The man, however, didn't find much worth in the offer. He didn't want to get suppressed under a mighty man's power, and therefore moved on.

Stanza 2

In the heat of the mid-day the houses
Stood with shut doors.
I wandered along the crooked lane.
An old man came out with his bag of gold. He
Pondered and said, "I will hire you with my
Money." He weighed his coins one by one,
But I turned away.

Reference :

Same as above

Context :

The poet in these lines shows that money fails to buy the services of the man.

Explanation :

The man kept walking, it was almost mid-day and it was quite a hot day. He only came across houses with doors that were shut. Wandering along the crooked lane, he soon came

across an old man who was holding a bag full of gold. The old man offered to pay the man with his gold in return of his services. The offer of wealth didn't lure the man, so he turned away.

Stanza 3

It was evening. The garden hedge was all a flower.

The fair maid came out and said,

"I will hire you with a smile."

Her smile paled and melted into tears, and she went

Back alone into the dark.

Reference :

Same as above

Context :

The poet on these lines highlights that even beauty fails to lure the man.

Explanation :

Now, the evening had set in. Yet, the man was unable to find a person whose offer would attract him. He came across a garden full of beautiful flowers. He came across a beautiful maid standing there. The lady offered to hire the man with her smile. The man realised that her beauty or smile was also not forever. Her smile faded away and tears replaced it. The man moved on leaving the lady all by herself.

Stanza 4

The sun glistened on the sand, and the sea

Waves broke waywardly.

A child sat playing with shells.

He realised his head and seemed to know

Me and said, 'I hire you with nothing.'

From henceforward that bargain struck in

Child's play made me a free man.

Reference :

Same as above

Context :

The poet in these lines shows that innocence manages to buy what power, wealth and beauty failed to buy.

Explanation :

Finally, the man reached the seashore. The sun was almost setting down, it shone brightly on the sand. He saw a child playing with shells. The child looked up at the man. It seemed as if the child understood the man. The child offered to hire the services of the man. It seemed as if the child understood the man. The child offered to hire the services of the man., but didn't offer to pay anything in return. That was the bargain that perhaps the man was looking for. There were no demands, no conditions no payments or repayments. In playing with the child he continued to hold on to his freedom. He was a free man still.

NCERT Corner

Working with the poem

1. Who is the speaker in the poem?

An ordinary man, looking for work, is the speaker of the poem.

2. "The king, sword in hand" suggests

- (i) wealth (ii) power (iii) more power than wealth

Mark the appropriate item in the context of stanza1.

Ans. (ii) power

3. The old man offered the speaker a lot of money. Why did he turn down the offer?

The speaker turned down the offer for a lot of money because his freedom was more important than the gleam of gold.

4. Find the poem, lines that match the following. Read both one after another.

- (i) I have nothing to give you expect goodwill and cheer.
(ii) Her happiness was no more than sorrow in disguise.
(iii) The king's might was not worth much.

Ans. (i) I hire you with nothing.

(ii) Her smile paled and melted into tears.

(iii) But his power counted for naught.

5. How did the speaker feel after talking to the child on the beach?

The speaker felt like a 'free man' after talking to the child on the beach. He felt happy and relieved. He need not compromise his freedom and in return he was to get goodwill and cheer. It was a fair deal.

Chapter Practice

Very Short Answer Type Questions

1. Who all had the man encountered till the evening?

The man encountered the king in the morning. Towards mid-day, he met the old man. In the evening, he came across the fair maid.

2. Did the man compromise?

No, the man did not compromise. He didn't accept the offers made by the king, the old man and the fair maid because none convinced him.

3. What was the child doing when the speaker met him?

The child was playing with shells when the speaker met him on the seashore.

Short Answer Type Questions

1. Why did the man turn down the offer made by the king, the old man and the fair lady?

The man turned down the offers made by the king, the old man and the fair lady because neither wealth nor power nor beauty attracted him. The man was looking for job, but not at the cost of his freedom. He desired good well and happiness.

2. What do the sword, the gold and the smile of the fair lady signify?

The sword signified power. The gold signified wealth. The smile of the fair lady signified beauty. None of these were capable enough to give the man everlasting happiness. Nor did any of these assure the man of his freedom.

Value Based Questions

1. The poem invests a lot of faith in the idea of freedom comment.

Rabindranath Tagore, being a champion of human rights, invests a lot of faith in the idea of human freedom. The poem, therefore, showcases a wilful rejection of power, money and beauty as none of these are as necessary for human growth and development as freedom. The works of the author especially coincide with the Indian national struggle. Therefore, too, the idea of individual freedom is upheld and glorified.

Extract Based Questions

Extract 1

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

"The sun glistened on the sand, and the sea

Waves broke waywardly.

A child set playing with shells.

He raised his head and seemed to

Know me and said,

'I hire you with nothing.'

From henceforward that bargain

Struck in child's play

Made me a free man."

1. Who is the speaker of these lines?

- (a) The king (b) The poet (c) The child (d) The man

Ans. (d) the man

2. Where did the speaker meet the child?

- (a) At the seashore (b) At the stone-paved road
(c) In the garden (d) Near the crooked lane

Ans. (a) At the seashore

3. What was the child doing when the speaker met him?

- (a) Playing with a sword (b) Playing with the sea shells
(c) Plucking flowers (d) Counting coins

Ans. (b) Playing with the sea shells

4. Did the child know the speaker?

The speaker felt that the child seemed to understand him.

5. What did the child tell the speaker?

The child told the speaker, "I hire you with nothing."

6. What was the reaction of the speaker?

The speaker felt relieved and happy on striking this deal.

Extract 2

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

" I n the heat of the mid-day
The houses stood with shut doors.
I wandered along the crooked lane.
An old man came out with his bag of gold
He pondered and said,
'I will hire you with my money'
He weighed his coins one by one,
But I turned away."

1. Who is the speaker of these lines?

- (a) The king (b) The poet (c) The child (d) The man

Ans. (d) The man

2. Where did the speaker meet the child?

- (a) At the seashore (b) At the stone- paved road
(c) In the garden (d) Near the crooked lane

Ans. (a) At the seashore

3. What was the old man carrying?

- (a) A bag of money (b) A sword (c) A flower (d) sea shells

Ans. (a) A bag of money

4. What was the weather on the day?

The day was quite warm.

5. What was the offer that the old man made?

The old man said, " I will hire you with my money."

6. Does the speaker accept the offer?

No, the speaker does not accept the offer. He was not lured by money.



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