

Grade VIII - English

Lesson 5. Princess September

Supplementary Reader

Soul of the Chapter

The King had Nine Daughters

The king of Siam had nine daughters, The Queen used to find it difficult to remember so many names, so the King named his daughters after the name of the months of the year. Therefore, the eldest was called January and the youngest was named September. The King had a peculiar habit of giving gifts to his daughters on his birthday. One year he gifted a green and yellow parrot in a golden cage to each of his daughters. The daughters loved their gifts and were proud of their parrots. They taught their parrots to say 'God save the King' and 'Pretty Polly.'

Princess September's Parrot Dies

one morning when Princess September went to say good morning to her parrot, she saw her parrot lying dead at the bottom of its golden cage. The Princess burst into a flood of tears. Nothing that her Maids of Honour said comforted her. The Queen found all this non-sensual and ordered the Maid of Honour to put the Princess in her bed, without serving her any dinner.

The Little Bird

While the Princess lay in her bed, crying in grief of her dead parrot, a little bird came hopping into her room. As the Princess saw him, he began to sing a beautiful song, about the lakes, the trees and the willow and so on . When he had finished singing, the Princess was not crying anymore and she had forgotten that she was hungry. The little bird asked her to take him in place of the parrot.

Next morning with great delight, the Princess showed the little bird to all her sisters. For each of the sisters, the bird sang a new and beautiful song. Then, the Princess showed her new friend to the King and the Queen. The King was delight to see the bird, for the bird sang beautifully and was unlike the parrots of the eight sister who just knew how to say, 'God save the King' and 'Pretty Polly.'

The Sisters Grew Jealous of September

Seeing the King speaking favourable of the little bird and hearing him sing beautifully, the eight sister grow jealous of September. The sister decide to plan a strategy to get rid of the little bird. They made an offer to September; to give their pocket money in helping September to buy a new parrot. When September refused they questioned the freedom of the bird by pointing out to his absence every now and then, making September insecure. They also advised her not to take any risks and put the bird in the cage.

September Begins to Worry

On realising that the bird had been away too long, September begins to worry about the safety of her bird. She fears hawks and snares might have harmed it. She also begins to fancy ideas like the bird might have forgotten her and become a pet to someone else. All these ideas greatly disturb her.

When the bird returns, on being asked behind his delay, the bird unknowing of the circumstances honestly tells her that his father-in-law was giving a party and he intended not to come back. Hearing this, September makes up her mind and puts the bird in the cage. Initially the bird thought that September was putting him temporarily in the cage, but when he realised he was being caged forever he becomes very unhappy.

The Bird Stops Singing and Later on it was Freed

The bird could not sing any further as he was unable to feel the beauty of lakes, trees, willows and so on. He also refused to have food. The next morning, he lay lifeless at the bottom of the cage. September thinks that the bird had died.

The bird tells the Princess that he could not sing if he cannot fly and if he doesn't sing he would die. September feels very sorry for what she had done and therefore frees the bird. The bird promises that he loved her would keep coming to meet the Princess. The Princess, though sad, puts the bird's happiness on priority and frees him forever. She always kept the windows of her room open for the bird to come whenever he pleased to.

1. How many daughters did the royal couple have?

The royal couple had nine daughters.

2. Why were they named after the months of the year?

They were named after the months of the year because their Queen Mother found it difficult to remember so many names.

3. The King had a peculiar habit. What was it? Why is it called peculiar?

Giving gifts on his birthday was a peculiar habit that the King had. It was called peculiar because usually people received gifts on their birthdays.

4. (i) What was Princess September's reactions to the loss of her parrot?

Princess September burst into tears when she saw her parrot lying dead in its cage.

(ii) What was her mother's reaction to it?

Her mother found it non-sensual to be crying over a dead bird and hardly paid any heed to the Princess's loss.

(iii) What do the reactions indicate about the nature and temperament of each?

The Princess was attached to her parrot and therefore, gets sentimental over its death. The Queen, on the other hand, looked at it in a distanced and mature manner and doesn't therefore, attach any importance to the incident of parrot's death.

5. What pulled the Princess out of her gloom?

A little bird that came hopping into her room pulled the Princess out of gloom. The bird also sang beautifully.

6. How did the Maids of Honour come to know that the Princess and the bird had become intimate friends?

When the Maid of Honour brought the Princess breakfast, the little bird was still there. He ate rice from the hands of the Princess and had bath in her saucer and then sang a beautiful song for the Princess. The Maids of Honour could easily understand how good friends they had become.

7. The new bird was full of new songs, but the old parrots always repeated themselves.

What did they say?

The old parrots only said, 'God save the King.'

8. What is the King's opinion about his Councillors? Why did he form that opinion?

The King felt that his councillor's only sang empty praises of him. Like the parrots, they could say the same thing in seven different language, but they never meant anything that they said.

9. (i) The eight Princess made an offer to Princess September. What was it?

The other Princesses offer to put together their pocket money to buy a green and yellow parrot for their sister.

(ii) Why, in your view, did they do it?

They were jealous of the little bird that their sister had, who sang beautifully.

10. What did the sisters advice the Princess to do about her bird?

The sisters advise the Princess to put her little bird in a cage.

Comprehension Check - 2

1. In the following sentence elaborate the parts given in bold. Under the circumstances it was a very unfortunate remark for the bird to make.

When the Princess was giving into the advise given to her sisters, suspecting that the bird may never come back, the little bird made unfortunate remarks such as "The fact is I very nearly didn't come back tonight at all. My father-in-law was giving a party...."

2. (i) What did Princess September do to ensure the safety of her pet?

To ensure the safety of the little bird, the Princess put the bird into the cage.

(ii) How did the bird react to it?

The bird refused to be caged and put behind the bars. He grew very unhappy and told the Princess that everything looked different when viewed from behind the bars. He grew very unhappy and told the Princess that everything looked different when viewed from behind the bars.

3. Why did the bird refuse to be taken out in her cage?

The bird refused to be taken into the cage because he could not see the tree, the lake and the rice fields and so on. He told the Princess that everything looked different when viewed from behind the bars.

4. (i) What persuaded Princess September to give the bird his freedom again?

The bird had become so unhappy in the cage that it almost looked lifeless. The

Princess game him back his freedom because she didn't want him to die.

(ii) How did the bird react to it?

He thanked the Princess and told her he would come back and then spreading his wings flew into the open sky.

5. Princess September kept her window open day and night.

(i) How did it help the bird?

Princess September kept the window open day and night so that the bird could easily come and go whenever it liked.

(ii) How did it help the Princess herself?

The open breeze that came in from the window helped in making the Princess extremely beautiful. Later, she was married to the King of Cambodia.

6. The eight sisters kept their windows shut How did it affect them?

The eight sisters that kept their windows closed became ugly and disagreeable. Only the king's councillors were a fitting choice for them.

Exercise

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

1. Are the sisters unkind and cruel? Find evidence in the text to support your idea.

Yes, The sisters were unkind and cruel to Princess September. They were jealous of her little bird because it sang sweet songs for her. Also every time he was asked to sing, he sang a new song.

The parrots of the sisters only knew how to say 'God save the King' or 'Pretty Polly.' They, therefore, instigated the Princess September to put her bird in the cage and aroused unnecessary fear in her.

2. Which to you, is the most important idea in this story and why?

- (i) Importance of music
- (ii) Value of freedom
- (iii) Beauty of nature

Ans.

(ii) The most important idea in the chapter is the value of freedom. When the little bird's freedom is curbed it almost becomes lifeless. On being given his freedom, he is able to

live life happily, sing beautiful songs and also remains grateful and loyal to the Princess.

Chapter Practice

Very Short Answer Type Questions

1. After what were the king's nine daughters named?

The king's daughters were named after the names of the months in an year, but in the Siamese language.

2. What were the gift that the King gave to his daughters on his birthday?

The King gifted a green parrot in a golden cage to his daughters on his birthday.

3. Why did the Maids of Honour put the crying Princess in the bed and went away?

The Maids of Honour had to go for a party. They, therefore, quickly put the Princess in the bed and went away.

4. What was the little bird's song based upon?

The little bird sang a song about the lake in the king's garden. The willow trees that reflected its image in the water and the goldfish that glided in and out of the branches in that image.

5. What did the bird tell the Princess to convince her to be friends?

The little bird asked the Princess to take him in place of her parrot. He told her that he was not as beautiful as the parrot, but had a lovely voice.

6. Whom does the king compare the parrots with?

The King draws a comparison between his councillors and the parrots. Both of them said the same thing, 'God save the King' or 'Pretty Polly', without meaning it.

7. Why were the other sisters vexed?

The eight sisters were vexed because Princess September's bird sang beautifully whereas their parrots only knew to say two phrases.

8. Where had the bird gone when the sisters come to meet Princess September?

The bird had gone to pay a visit to his father-in-law when the sisters come to meet Princess September.

9. What does the bird do when the Princess puts her into the cage?

The bird didn't suspect the Princess to have thought of putting him in a cage. HE gets

shocked and was unable to say anything when the Princess actually does that.

10. What reason does the Princess give the bird for putting him into the cage?

The Princess tells the bird that her mother's cats had been prowling around and to ensure the bird's safety she was putting him in the cage.

Short Answer Type Questions

1. Why does the Princess get worried about her bird?

The Princess gets worried because the bird had been away for a very long time, She fears that the hawks and the snares might have harmed the bird. She also thinks that the bird might have forgotten her or taken fancy to someone else.

2. Why does the bird stop singing in the middle of the song?

The bird doesn't feel comfortable behind the closed bars of the cage. He feels uneasy; though he was unable to comprehend it. Suddenly, in the middle of the further and stops singing.

3. What does the Princess fear the next morning?

When the Princess woke up next morning and called out to the bird, the bird gave no reply. He remained to lie at the bottom of the cage with its eyes closed. The Princess feared that the bird might have died.

4. What according to the author was very difficult to do?

According to the author it is very difficult to put the happiness of someone you love before your own. The Princess, however, finally places the happiness of the bird before her own happiness and lets him go, knowing that without him she would become lonely.

5. What did the little bird say when the Princess released him from the cage?

The little bird promised the Princess that he would never forget her and would come back as he loved the Princess. He also told the Princess that no matter how far he went he would always come back to meet and spend time with the Princess.

Long Answer Type Questions

1. Why do the sisters end up marrying the people they do?

When Princess September grew up, she grew extremely beautiful. Her sensitivity for the bird and his freedom and the open breeze made her amicable. She was, therefore, married to the King of Cambodia and was carried on a white elephant all the way to the city in which the King lived. The other sisters grew up to be ugly and disagreeable and were given away to the King's Councillors.

They tell her that she had given too much freedom to her bird and the bird may never come back. The sisters advise the Princess to put the bird in a cage, as they were jealous of the Princess's bird.

Value Based Questions

1. Does the story recommend the idea of birds being made pets?

No, the idea of birds as pets may sound cute and loveable but the birds should never be turned into pets and thereby put in cages. The inherent nature of birds is to fly. By putting them behind bars we curb what they are meant for. Unlike human beings and animals that do not have wings, birds are blessed with wings so that they could fly. By controlling their flight, we are going against the laws of nature.

The bird in the story almost becomes lifeless when he realise that he could be caged forever. The parrot could have also died for similar reasons.

2. Why did the sisters mock Princess September?

The eight sisters were jealous of Princess September. When they get to know that Princess September had released her bird, they mock her for her stupidity.

They tell her that bird would never come back and that she had made a blunder. But, the bird did come back and sang a beautiful song for the Princess. He also ate from her hand and used to love the Princess dearly.
