

Grade VIII - English

Lesson 7. The Open Window

Supplementary Reader

Soul of the Chapter

Framton Nuttel has a Nervous Breakdown

Framton Nuttel had a nervous breakdown. He migrates to the rural spaces in order to seek some relief. His sister, however, was sceptical that his problem might get worse as he would hardly get to meet anyone in the rural spaces and lose it completely. She, therefore, gives him letters of introduction to meet people whom she considered quite nice and who could keep good company to Nuttel.

Framton Nuttel Meets a Young Lady

Framton Nuttel goes to pay a visit to one such lady, Mrs. Sappleton. While waiting for Mrs Sappleton, who was to come down to meet him shortly, he meets her niece. The niece was a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen. Nuttel attempts to say something nice to the niece, but he was unable to come up with appropriate sentences. The young lady broke the silence and began asking him questions. She found out that Framton Nuttel neither knew many people in that place nor knew anything about her aunt.

The Niece Began to Supply Information about her Aunt

Gathering from Framton that he had no prior knowledge about her aunt, the young lady began telling him her aunt's tragic story. She told him that some tragic incident took place about three years ago. She told him the secret of the French window and why it was always kept open, even on an October afternoon.

The young lady told Framton that three years ago from the same window her aunt's husband and two brothers and a spaniel dog went out for shooting and never came back till date. While going to their favourite shooting ground, they got engulfed in a dog. Their bodies were never recovered. Her aunt, however, continues to believe that some day they would come back. Thus, the open window!

Details about the Group that Left

The niece also shares with Framton the details about the group that left. She recalls her aunt telling her that her husband was carrying a white waterproof coat over his arm. Ronnie, her aunt's younger brother, would always sing, "Bertie, why do you bound?" to tease his sister. The niece breaks down at this moment and tells Framton that at times she got a creepy feeling that the three of them would walk in from the window any time.

Mrs Sappleton Enters the Room

Just then, Mrs Sappleton enters the room, full of apologies for the delay. She also apologises for the open window, explaining that her husband and brothers would be returning home any time. While Mrs Sappleton kept talking about the shooting, the marshes, the duck and so on; poor Framton felt miserable. He tried to sway the conversation to less ghastly topics but without any success. He tried to tell Mrs Sappleton about his condition, the doctor's treatment and recommendations, being aware that all her attention was focussed on the open window.

Framton was Horrified and Ran for his Life

Just while they were talking thus, Mrs Sappleton announced with great excitement, "Here they are at last!" Framton shivered to see three figures walking towards the window. They all carried guns and one of them also carried a white coat on his shoulders. He could also see a tired brown spaniel walking with them. As they neared the house, he heard a hoarse voice singing, "I say, Bertie, why do you bound?"

To Framton, these three figures walking towards the house was no less than encountering ghosts. He grabbed his stick and hat and ran through the hall door towards the gate. The entire group was amazed to see Framton running, without a word of polite greeting or farewell. At this, the young lady informed the group that perhaps it was the spaniel that scared him.

NCERT Folder

Comprehension Check-1

1. Why had Framton Nuttel come to the 'rural retreat'?

Framton Nuttel had come to the 'rural retreat' seeking comfort for his troubled nerves.

2. Why had his sister given him letters of introduction to people living there?

His sister was apprehensive that his problem might get worse if he would be all by himself during the 'rural retreat.' His sister, therefore, gave him letters of introductions to people living there, whom he could meet and be in company of.

3. What had happened in the Sappleton family as narrated by the niece?

According to the niece, the Sappleton family had been completely shattered because of a tragedy that had occurred three years ago.

The niece tells Framton that Mrs Sappleton's husband and brothers had gone shooting three years ago and had never returned ever since.

Comprehension Check-2

1. What did Mrs Sappleton say about the open windows?

Mrs Sappleton apologised for the open window on an October afternoon. She explained that she was expecting her husband and two brothers to come in from the window.

Since they were all muddy from the day's shooting, they entered through the window.

2. The horror on the girl's face made Framton swing around in his seat. What did he see?

Framton saw three figures that resembled the description Mrs Sappleton's niece had given about the dead trio that went for shooting, three years ago.

Comprehension Check-3

1. Why did Framton rush out wildly?

Framton was horrified to see the three figures, whom he understood to be dead, heading towards the window of the house.

2. What was the girl's explanation for his lightning exit?

The girl explained that Framton was scared of dogs, as he had mentioned in the conversation they had and therefore, he rushed out seeing the spaniel.

Exercise

Discuss in small groups.

1. Is this a mystery story? Give a reason for your answer.

Yes, the story is a mystery story. Mrs Sappleton's niece, Vera, narrates the tragedy of her aunt to Framton. Till the final climax, the readers believe it to be a true story.

She supplies all the details which make Framton believe that he was seeing ghosts when he sees Mrs Sappleton's husband and brothers walking towards the house.

2. You are familiar with the 'irony' of the situation in a story. (Remember The Cop and the Anthem in Class VII Supplementary Reader!) Which situations in 'The Open Window' are good examples of the use of irony?

The story is abundant in ironical situations. Framton had come for a rural retreat to treat his nervous breakdown.

The doctor had recommended him to remain free from stress, anxiety or any other such nervous excitement. Vera, on the other hand, chooses Framton as her victim, which makes him further disturbed and restless.

Similarly, Framton's avoidance of the ghastly topic gets further intensified with not just Mrs Sappleton talking constantly about the open window, but also the three supposedly dead figures walking in through it.

3. Which phrases/sentences in the text do you find difficult to understand? Select a few and guess the meaning of each. Rewrite a simple paraphrase of each.

Some of the difficult phrases are as follows

Ans.

- "You will bury yourself down there." _You will be all alone.
- "Come into the nice division." _The ones who could be called nice people.
- "Masculine habitation." _Suggesting that the room also belonged to men.
- "Treacherous piece of bog." _The bog didn't reveal the dangers on the surface but one could sink in if stepped on to it.

(e) "Romance at short notice." _Creating humour or stories for fun without any prior preparation.

Chapter Practice

Very Short Answer Type Questions

1. What doubts did Framton Nuttel Have about Meeting Strangers?

Framton Nuttel doubted if formal visits to meet a series of strangers would be of any help in curing his nerve problem.

2. When was Framton's sister living in the countryside or in the rural area?

Around four years ago, Framton's sister had come to live in these rural areas where Framton had come looking for a cure for his nerves.

3. Why was it unusual for the window to be open on an October afternoon?

October afternoons were warm times of the year and it was therefore, unusual to have window open during this time of the day.

4. What was the first clue that Vera uses to narrate such to Framton?

On getting know that Framton didn't know many people and hardly knew anything about her aunt, Vera uses the opportunity to create a story to fool Framton and have fun at his expense.

5. What does Vera say about Framton and the dogs?

Vera explains to her aunt and others that Framton had once been hunted somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of dogs and was therefore, terribly scared of dogs.

6. How closely did Framton knew Mrs Sappleton?

Framton hardly knew anything about Mrs Sappleton. He only knew her name and address. He didn't even know whether she was in the married or windowed state.

7. What expression did Framton see on Vera's face that made Framton uncomfortable?

Framton saw an expression of dazed horror on Vera's face. This made him uncomfortable and he swung around in his seat and looked in the same direction.

8. What was the doctor's recommendation to Framton?

The doctors had ordered Framton complete rest, an absence of mental excitement and avoidance of any laborious physical exercise.

Short Answer Type Questions

1. What questions did Vera pose to Framton before beginning with her story?

Breaking the silence between the two, Vera asked Framton if he knew many people round there.

When Framton replied in the negative, she pursued him to answer her second questions, whether he knew much about her aunt.

Having attained answers to these two questions, she started telling him the story of her aunt.

2. What details did Vera give about her aunt's husband and brother's shooting expedition on that fateful day?

Vera tells Framton that three years ago, her aunt's husband and brothers left for their favourite shooting ground.

It was a dreadful summer and places that were safe in other years became unsafe without anybody knowing. They came across a treacherous bog, which engulfed them and their bodies were never recovered.

3. What emotions did Vera display while telling the story? How did that help her?

While telling her aunt's tragic story, her self-possessed demeanour gave way to a very piteous tone for the grief her aunt had experienced.

She also broke into a shudder while sharing with Framton her fear that she thought that those people may return any time. Her emotions made the story appear authentic.

4. Does Mrs Sappleton talk about her husband and brothers on purpose?

No, Mrs Sappleton didn't talk about her husband and brothers on purpose. She was talking about them in a very routine manner. Perhaps, going for shooting and coming back all muddy through the window was a regular feature. Since, it was time for them to return, she was waiting for them.

Long Answer Type Questions

1. What details Vera share about the group which made it easier for Framton to recognise the three figures in the dark?

Framton was able to identify the three figures in the dark as Mrs Sappleton's husband and two brothers on the basis of details furnished by Vera.

He saw that all three men were carrying guns; one of them was additionally carrying a white coat. Besides this, he saw a tired brown spaniel and could hear one of the men singing "Bertie, why do you bound?" All these details were supplied by Vera.

2. Do you think that the tragic story Vera told about Mrs Sappleton was true? How do we get to know?

No, the tragic story Vera told about Mrs Sappleton was not true. Mrs Sappleton's husband and brothers were not engulfed by the bog and were not dead.

In the end when Mrs Sappleton's husband and brothers were heading towards the house, Framton runs away with fear.

Believing the story to be true, for him, he was seeing ghosts walking. Knowing well the reason for Framton's fear, Vera withholds the truth and tells them that he was afraid of dogs.

3. If the story was not true, what makes the story so real for Framton?

Vera had created the story using details from regular and routine events. She knew that her aunt's husband and brothers came back from shooting through the window.

She also had access to details like what they were wearing and what their temperaments were. She used these real facts and twisted them to create a sense which made Framton feel that dead people were walking towards the window. Therefore, her story though not true appeared real and believable.

Value Based Question

Is it right to have fun at someone else's expense? Was Vera right in doing what she did?

Fun, at times, can be had at someone else's expense. We often play pranks on the others. However, there is a very thin line between being right or wrong in such cases. Vera was not justified in doing what she did, though perhaps she did it in complete ignorance.

Framton was already a patient of nerves. He was undergoing treatment and had come for a rural retreat to derive some comfort. Vera's story/prank would have added to his disturbed state of nerves.
