



Grade VIII

Lesson 2. Children at Work

Supplementary Reader

Soul of the Chapter

Velu Ran Away from Home and Reached Chennai

Velu, an eleven year old boy, ran away from home. He kept wandering before getting on to a train to Chennai without a ticket. A porter shouted at Velu to get side; as Velu was getting lost in the crowd. He put his bundle down and sat on a bench not knowing where to go and what to do.

Velu had never seen so many people earlier, except once a year, at the fair. People kept walking by, bumping onto him. There was a lot of noise on the platform. A voice kept announcing something on the loudspeaker. Velu felt tired and exhausted. He hadn't eaten anything for two days except for some peanuts and jaggery. The first day after running from home, he had to walk the entire day. He had no money at all and therefore, he also had to travel without a ticket.

Velu Meets Jaya who Asked Him if He Had Run Away from Home

Just when Velu was feeling miserable, he heard a rough voice calling out. Velu opened his eyes and saw a girl standing next to him. She asked Velu if he was new to the town. The girl was wearing a long banian and was carrying a huge sack on her shoulders. She was stuffing the sack with dirty plastic cups that she was picking from the floor.

Jaya asks Velu if he had run away from home. Velu did not wish to tell a stranger his story. He does not tell Jaya that he had run away from home because he was tired getting beaten by his father and that his father snatched away all money that Velu and his sisters used to earn.

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Jeya Helps Velu to Find Food

Jeya tells Velu that there were many children like Velu, who have left their homes, are to be found in the town. Velu was feeling very hungry and his stomach was hurting due to starvation. Jaya tells Velu that he won't get food merely by sitting there. She offers him help in finding food. Though not sure, Velu begins to follow Jaya, for he didn't know what else to do. Both had to walk a great deal. She finally takes to a wedding function. Jaya, at that point, indicates towards a big garbage bin as their potential treat. She offers Velu a banana from the bin.

At first, Velu refuses to take the food from the bin. He sees two goats standing on the pile and a cloud of flies buzzing around them. Yet, he then decides to take the food because he could not control his hunger any further. After eating a banana and vada from the bin, Velu feels his hunger satiated a bit.

Jaya Leaves for Work

Directing Velu, Jaya begins to leave for work. Velu panics; he didn't know where to go if Jaya would leave him alone. He decides to go along with Jaya. Jaya takes Velu to her house, where she dumps one sack and picks up an empty one to gather more trash. Jaya tells Velu that she was a ragpicker and if Velu wanted to make money, he could do the same job.

Velu did not know what ragpicking was nor could he understand why someone would buy the rubbish that Jaya was collecting. Nonetheless, he decides to follow Jaya and work with her till he found a better job to sustain himself.

NCERT Corner

Comprehension Check

Check 1

1. Velu stood on the platform but he felt "as if he was still on a moving train". Why?

Velu felt that he was "still on a moving train" because his legs were shaking. He was tired and exhausted because of the journey. Also, because he had hardly eaten anything and on the first after having left his home, he had to walk the entire day.



2. What made him feel miserable?

Velu felt miserable because he didn't know where to go. He was confused seeing so many people. He had never seen so many people earlier in his life except at the fair. Hunger was hurting his stomach and the noise was making his head spin. He also felt miserable because people kept bumping into him with their luggage.

3. (i) Velu travelled without a ticket. Why?

Velu travelled without a ticket because he had no money to buy one.

(ii) How did he escape the ticket collector's attention?

He escaped the ticket collector's attention because the ticket collector didn't come to the unreserved coach.

4. Why had Velu run away from home?

Velu ran away from home because his father was a drunkard and Velu was tired of the daily doses of beating that he received from his father. He could also not keep any money that he earned, for it was snatched away by his father.

5. Why did he decide to follow the 'strange' girl?

Velu decided to follow the strange girl because he neither knew where to go nor did he know how to read the signboards as they were in English. He thought it was better to follow the girl who seemed friendly, rather than getting lost.

Check 2

1. Can Velu read Tamil and English? How do you know?

Velu could read Tamil, but not English. He manages to read the banner, Central Jail, which was written in Tamil; but could make no sense of what was written on the signboards as the writing was all in English.

2. "If you are not careful, you will soon be counting bars there." the girl said.

(i) What is she referring to?

The girl was referring to the Central Jail.

(ii) What does she mean when she says "If you are not careful..." (She says something a little later which means the same. Find that sentence.)

The girl tries to tell Velu that the police can catch or arrest him even if he hasn't done anything wrong. The sentence, You don't have to do anything. Just don't get caught" means the same thing.



3. (i) Where did the girl lead Velu to?

The girl leads Velu to a marriage hall, Sri Rajrajeshwari Prasanna Kalyan Mandapam.

(ii) What did they get to eat?

They get to eat leftover food like bananas and vadas from the garbage bin placed outside the marriage hall..

4. What work did she do? Think of a one word answer.

Ragpicking.

Check 3

1. (i) What material are the 'strange' huts made out of?

The strange houses were made of metal sheets, tyres, bricks, wood and plastic.

(ii) Why does Velu find them strange?

Velu finds them strange because they were very different from the houses in his village. In Velu's village, the houses were made of mud and palm leaves.

2. What sort of things did Jaya and children like her collect and what did they do with those things?

Jaya and the children like her collected paper, empty bottles, plastic and glass and sold all such stuff to Jam Bazaar Jaggu, who later sold these to a factory.

3. Is Velu happy or unhappy to find work? Give a reason for your answer.

Velu was not happy to work as a ragpicker, but he had no choice till he could find a better job.

Check 4

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

1. Is Velu a smart boy? Which instances in the text show that he is or isn't?

No, Velu was not a smart boy. He had run away from home without any money. He knew nothing about the place he had travelled to. He expected to find work in a farm, not knowing that there were no farms. He chooses to follow Jaya without knowing anything about her.



- 2. Do you think Jaya is a brave and sensitive child with a sense of humour? Find instances of her courage, kind nature and humour in the text.**

Yes, Jaya is a brave and sensitive child with a good sense of humour. She is a brave girl as she supports herself in this lone world. She was sensitive towards the plight of Velu and tries to help him.

She guides Velu, helps him find food and also assists him in finding work. Her sense of humour emerges at various points. The way she shows Velu the Central Jail and gives tips on not being caught, while they are eating from the garbage bin and also when she calls trickling water Buckingham Canal, she displays a brilliant sense of humour.

- 3. What one throws away as waste may be valuable to others. Do you find this sentence meaningful in the context of this story? How?**

Yes, for people who cannot afford proper food, leftover and thrown away food is important for their survival. The rich people waste a lot of food, but this food supports Velu and Jaya and the children like them. Jaya is a ragpicker and as a ragpicker she collects trash which is of no use to many people. Velu, himself, fails to understand the worth of collecting rubbish, something that is very important to Jaya, Jam Bazaar Jaggu and other ragpickers.

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Very Short Answer Type Questions

- 1. How long had Velu been away from his home, when we meet him first?**

It had been two days since Velu had run away from his home, when the story opens.

- 2 What were the contents of the bundle that Velu carried with him?**

In his bundle, Velu had brought with him a shirt, a towel and a comb.

- 3. Why does Velu get surprised on seeing Jaya?**

Velu gets surprised on seeing Jaya because she was a complete stranger and Velu could not understand why she could be calling him.

- 4. What was Jaya's first act of help for Velu?**

After offering to find food for Velu, Jaya helps Velu in crossing the road. Velu was at a loss in dealing with the traffic on the road.



5. What does Velu make out of the signboards?

Velu didn't know how to read English. He could not therefore understand anything that was written on the signboards. He only saw the pictures of banians, car tyres, pens and a woman holding a box.

6. What catches Velu's attention as he reaches the wedding hall?

Velu's attention got caught by the big cars parked outside the wedding hall. Especially one of the cars that was decorated with roses and garlands of flowers attracted Velu's attention the most.

7. Who was Jam Bazaar Jaggu?

Jam Bazaar Jaggu was the person to whom Jaya and the children like her used to sell the rubbish they used to collect. Jaggu used to sell it further to factories.

8. Why Velu was shocked seeing the food given to him by Jaya?

Jaya had given to Velu food that was overflowing from the garbage bin lying behind the wedding hall.

Velu was shocked to see that he would have to eat leftover food.

Short Answer Type Questions

1. Describe the difficulties faced by Velu while crossing the road.

Velu found that vehicles kept coming on the road and never stopped; making it impossible to cross. Smoke and dust also proved problematic. There was hardly any gap to go to the other side of the road, till Jaya dragged him.

2. What was similar between Velu and Jaya?

Both Jaya and Velu had nobody to depend on. They were all alone and had to fend for themselves. Both Jaya and Velu were to work hard to survive in this world. Jaya is also able to understand that Velu had run away from home; perhaps she had done the same.

3. What warning does Jaya give to Velu?

Jaya warns Velu against getting caught by the police and being put into the jail. Jaya specially points out to the building of the Central Jail to advice Velu to be cautious as one need not have done anything wrong for being put behind the bars.



4. Why does Velu decide to stick to Jaya?

Velu realises that he was not just too new to the place, but also had difficulty in reading the sign boards, as they were written in English. It was also difficult for him to find his way. So, he decides to be in the company of Jaya who seemed to know a lot about the place.

Long Answer Type Questions

1. Discuss what all could Velu have experienced, had Jaya not helped him?

Velu might have got lost in the big city. He hardly knew where to go. Further, he didn't know how to read the signboards in English. He might have been trapped by the police and landed up in jail for no fault of his.

Jaya's warning clearly indicates this. Also, Velu might have died of starvation, not knowing where to get food from, not having access to any money. Jaya helps him escape out of all these potential problems.

2. Describe the events of Velu's day when he left his home.

On the first day, Velu had to walk for most of the day from his village to Kanur before he got onto a train for Chennai. Since, Velu had no money, he could not buy a ticket and had to travel without one. Fortunately for him, the ticket collector didn't come to his compartment. He had to sleep on the floor near the door, amidst the noise produced by a group of men who played cards.

Value Based Questions

1. What does the food overflowing from the garbage bin indicate? Should one be more conscious of food wastage?

In rich people's weddings and social gatherings, a lot of food gets wasted. The untouched excess food and the leftover food are, indiscriminately, thrown into the garbage bin. At least the untouched excess food could be distributed among poor people. Also, people could become conscious and take only the amount of food that they can actually consume and avoid wastage. Yes, we should be very conscious of the wastage of food because it is a pity to see that poor children like Velu, Jaya and many others like them have nothing to eat.



2. Why do you think Velu chooses to do the work of ragpicking? Is it in any way linked to food?

Yes, Velu chooses to work as a ragpicker in order to support and sustain himself. The main need of the poor people is to somehow ensure food for themselves in order to survive. Velu understood that getting food without doing any work was difficult. He, therefore, decides to temporarily work as a ragpicker till he found a new job.



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