

Grade VIII

Lesson 4. The Treasure Within

Supplementary Reader

Soul of the Chapter

Hafeez Contractor's Biggest Nightmare

Hafeez Contractor shares with Bela Raja, his biggest nightmare. He tells Bela that till 4-5 years ago he used to get nightmares that he was appearing for a mathematics examination and he was not prepared for it. It is only now that he has settled in his professional life that he has got over these bad dreams.

When Bela asks Hafeez about his earliest memories of school, he tells her that he was a good student, but only till the second standard. He informs Bela that after the third standard, he suddenly lost interest in studies and would spend all his time playing pranks on others. He used to cheat in the exams and adopt unfair means to be able to pass the examination.

The Principal's Advice Changed his Life

Hafeez recollects how the one sentence once spoken by the school Principal had a life changing impact on him. When Hafeez reached the eleventh standard, the principal told him that he was a good student, but he never studied. He also told Hafeez that now on he wouldn't be able to take care of him. He gave meaning to Hafeez's life by making him conscious that after the death of his father, his mother had worked very hard to raise him. It was now his turn to repay and take care of his mother.

Hafeez tells Bela that he was a sportsman and a champion along with being the cricket captain. But after that incident, he stopped playing and concentrated entirely on his studies. All he did during that first year was to eat, pray and study. At the end of that year, he fared very well in his exams and secured a 50% marks. His Principal congratulated him by saying that these 50% were no less than distinction.



Hafeez- his Memory and his Pranks

On being asked other questions, Hafeez tells Bela that he had a memory that would fail him easily. He used to forget things quickly until and unless they were presented to him in the form of a book. Then, he would be able to recollect like a photograph.

Hafeez further informs Bela that he was only interested in playing or in trying pranks on others. Because, he was not interested in studies, he would distract the others. Mostly he used to spend study hours playing 'chor police'. Once in a week, he and his gang of friends used to go to watch a movie. He was the leader of his gang and what interested him were gang fights and planning strategies for the same, not academics. Therefore, his juniors would do an advance booking of his text books for he opened them and they were brand new.

What Hafeez Wanted to be and What he Actually Became

Hafeez wanted to join the Army. He had even got the admission letter, but his aunt tore up that letter. He, then, wanted to join the police force. His mother asked him not to join police, but just to do his graduation. So, he went to Jaihind College in Bombay, by using someone's influence. There he studied German, till his teacher died. After the death of his teacher, he started learning French from his cousin, who was an architect's wife.

He started going to an architect's office to learn French. There he saw somebody drawing a window. Hafeez was able to pinpoint the mistakes in the drawing. On being asked by his brother-in-law to draw a couple of things, the brother-in-law was surprised and asked him to join architecture. In the entrance exam for architecture, Hafeez got an 'A+' and there was no looking back after that. Hafeez managed to get a first division throughout. He explains that all this understanding came from what he used to play and do during school.

Hafeez goes Back to meet Mrs Gupta, his Teacher

While at school, one of his teachers, Mrs Gupta had told him seeing his sketches that could become a good architect. For everything else, he was quite useless. When he finally did become an architect, he went to meet her and let her know that she was quite right in her evaluation of him.



Bela asks Hafeez his Reasons for not Being Interested in Studies

Bela asks Hafeez his reasons for not being interested in studies, if it was the curriculum that made him disinterested. Hafeez explains that he was not good in languages and was extremely bad in maths. Also, he used to forget everything that was taught. There was no application of the mind. He also tells Bela that life in boarding school was very difficult. They used to copy work in the tests they used to write and the teacher used to assume that they had done their work.

Giftedness, Learning Disabilities and a Different Thinking

Bela questions him about a general belief about giftedness and disabilities going hand in hand. Hafeez remarks that he has observed toppers of his class doing ordinarily in life, and similarly many such other brilliant people. He observes that his street-smartness is helping him today. Many lessons were learnt independently, outside the academia.

Hafeez shares with Bela that his mind worked differently. If he saw that it was raining outside, he used to start thinking of ways to stop the water, of ways to construct a dam for the same and so on. He also shares how for many students he was very useful as he knew how to cut a perfect button from a chalk. Since there was a lot of emphasis on discipline, no student could afford to be without one.

Hafeez Worked Spontaneously and Instinctively

On being asked how he decided what he was to offer to his clients, Hafeez informed that observation was the key to it. He would observe how they talked, what they wore? What they eat? And he was able to assess their taste. He would spontaneously come up with a plan to suit their tastes. It could be called instinct, arithmetic or mathematics, he has begun loving the subject he hated the most, which is mathematics.

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NCERT Corner

Comprehension Check - Check 1

1. What did Hafeez Contractor have nightmares about?

Hafeez Contractor had nightmares that he was appearing for a maths and he did not remember anything.

2. What did the Principal say to him, which influenced him deeply?

The Principal explained to Hafeez how hard his mother had worked after the death of his father in order to raise him.

It was Hafeez's turn to repay the debt. These words had a life changing impact on Hafeez Contractor.

3. "...that year I did not step out onto the field."

What was he busy doing that year?

That particular year Hafeez Contractor dedicated his entire time to his studies.

4. (i) What 'distraction' did Hafeez Contractor create one day?

To escape studying, Hafeez Contractor would create a distraction. He made everyone play 'chor police' for whole one hour.

(ii) Would you have liked to participate in the 'distraction' had you been with him?

It is tempting to play the games that everyone else is playing. I, too, might have participated.

Comprehension Check - Check 2

1. Hafeez Contractor wanted to join the police force. Why didn't he?

Hafeez contractor wanted to join the police force, but he didn't because his mother was not in its favour.

His mother asked him to finish his graduation. He, therefore, joined the Jaihind College in Bombay.



2. In the architect's office. Hafeez Contractor was advised to drop everything and join architecture. Why?

In the architect's office he was advised to drop everything and join architecture because his drawing and sketching was excellent. Without having gained any training in the field. He was able to put various structures into perspective.

3. (i) What was Mrs Gupta's advice to Hafeez Contractor?

Mrs Gupta advised Hafeez to join architecture as she felt that he would excel in nothing, but architecture.

(ii) What made her advise him so?

Mrs Gupta was impressed by his sketches and therefore, she gave him this piece of advice.

4. How did he help fellow students who had lost a button?

Hafeez Contractor knew the skill of cutting a perfect button from chalk, a button that would stay fixed till the school ended. This way he would help fellow students who would have lost the button of their shirts or trousers.

5. Which rules did he break as a school boy?

As a student, Hafeez Contractor broke all rules. He used to cheat in exams, use unfair means to attain a copy of the question paper. He was also good at distracting the class and so on.

6. (i) What is Hafeez Contractor's definition of mathematics?

According to Hafeez Contractor, putting together designs, constructions, psychology and sociology and making a sketch from it is 'Mathematics'.

(ii) How would you want to define mathematics? Do you like the subject?

I would define maths as that branch of science that makes use of numerical to derive and prove concepts. I truly love this subject for it is very interesting.

Exercises

Answer the following questions.

1. Is it likely that someone who is original and intelligent does not do very well at school?

Should such a learner be called a failure? If not, why not?



It is quite possible that people who are original or intelligent do not do well at school. Such school think differently and imaginatively, something that doesn't match with the standard expectations of the school.

Such learner is not necessarily a failure, but a learner with different capacities.

2. Who, in your view, is an 'unusual' learner?

An 'unusual' learner is someone who may not be good in all subjects, but can do exceptionally well in another field. Usually, he is a person who proves himself to be a genius at some later point.

3. What can schools do to draw out the best in unusual learners? Suggest whatever seems reasonable to you.

These schools should enable the students to increase their potential in whatever they are good at. Also, extracurricular activities such as music, painting, dance and sports should be kept at par with academic subjects such as maths, sciences and languages.

Chapter Practice

Very Short Answer Type Questions

1. Why made Hafeez Contractor feel that the phase of getting nightmare was now over?

Hafeez Contractor thought that now since he doesn't need to think about examinations anymore, his psyche has got over with the phase of getting nightmare.

2. What was the designation of Bela Raja?

Bela Raja was an editor of Sparsh, a newsletter from the Resource Centre, The Valley School, Bangalore.

3. For how many years had Hafeez Contractor learnt French?

Hafeez Contractor had spent 7 years learning French. It is a different matter that he didn't even acquire the skill of speaking a few phrases correctly.

4. Who was Behram Divecha?

Behram Divecha was a friend of Hafeez Contractor with whom Hafeez used to have competitions for designing forts, guns and ammunition.



5. Which were the subjects that Hafeez was good at?

Hafeez mentions that he could deal with science and geography. At everything else, he was extremely bad.

6. When and with whom did Hafeez Contractor commence his career?

Hafeez Contractor began his career in 1977 under the apprenticeship of T Khareghat.

7. Whom does Hafeez Contractor give credit for the lessons he had learnt about life?

Hafeez Contractor notes that life at boarding schools was difficult, but that made him street smart. He credits those lessons for what he has learnt about life than academics.

8. What does Hafeez Contractor have to say about the class toppers?

Hafeez Contractor shares his observations about his class toppers and other good students. They were doing ordinarily in life.

9. What did Hafeez Contractor wish to do?

Hafeez Contractor wanted to join the Army. Later then, he thought of joining the police force. His aunt and mother were not in favour of these professions, respectively.

10. What did Hafeez Contractor plan Strategies for?

Hafeez Contractor planned strategies for fighting against the gangs.

Short Answer Type Questions

1. Why did the students use to book Hafeez Contractor's book in advance?

Hafeez Contractor hardly opened his books to study, except a little before the exams. His books were technically brand new.

The students knew this. His juniors, therefore, used to book his books in advance for their next class.

They could thereby buy second hand books which were almost new.

2. What does Hafeez Contractor say about his memory?

Hafeez Contractor said that he used to forget things very easily. He could remember only those things that he saw as a photograph. If he read a book, he could remember the matter like a photograph, but not so through his mind.



3. What used to be Hafeez Contractor's state of mind after incurring the wrath of his teachers?

Hafeez Contractor used to incur the wrath of his teachers quite often. However, he informed Bela Raja that he hardly had any time to reflect on the beating or scolding that he would have received from his teachers. He would be so busy playing.

4. Why did Contractor opt for German in Collage?

Hafeez Contractor had to choose between either French or German at Jaihind Collage. He chose to opt for German because he had spent 7 years learning French and he could hardly utter any words in French. So, he thought of trying his hand at German.

5. Describe Hafeez Contractor's activities during his eleventh grade.

During his eleventh grade, Hafeez Contractor was deeply stirred by the advice given to him by his school Principal.

That entire year, Contractor withdrew himself from the field and the various games he used to play and devoted his entire time to his studies. He used to merely eat, pray and study.

Long Answer Type Questions

1. What did Hafeez Contractor do in the architect's office that led to his becoming an architect himself?

In the architect's office, Hafeez Contractor saw someone making a drawing of a window. He pointed out the mistakes in the drawing and said that according to the sketch the window would never open.

Later, he made some specific drawings on asked by his brother-in-law and was found to be impressive for that particular field. This led to the future course of actions which in turn facilitated his becoming an architect.

2. Give examples from the book to indicate that Hafeez Contractor looked at things differently.

There are many instances in the chapter that prove that Hafeez Contractor looked at things differently. For instance, when it began to rain outside while he was in class, his mind would drift to think about ways to build a dam in order to block the flowing water.



He would also probe questions like how much water could the dam be able to hold and so on. To save his friends, he would apply his skill to cut buttons from a chalk with the help of a blade.

Value Based Questions

1. Why are students who are original in their thinking labelled as failures at school?

A school usually adheres to fixed and standard teaching and learning practices in accordance with a given curriculum. It, therefore, fails to acknowledge originality in children as it is constantly forcing them to be good in everything. However, in the process of becoming good in every subject, original thinkers at times forget what they are brilliant in. They end up being branded as failures.

2. What important lesson do we learn by looking closely at Hafeez Contractor's life?

Hafeez Contractor's life teaches us two important lessons. It, first, teaches us that it is never too late to decide to work hard. In his eleventh grade, when Contractor decides to work hard, he fares quite well in his exams. Secondly, his life also teaches us that we should not underestimate anyone's powers. Just because someone is a different learner doesn't mean that she is a failure.



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