



Grade IX

Lesson 5 - The Snake and the Mirror

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Prose

Soul of the Chapter

"The Snake and the Mirror" is a frightening tale told in a humorous way. The story has been written by V.M. Basheer, a well-known Malayalam writer. The incident in the story is both humorous and frightening. It also has a surprise ending. It is about a doctor's encounter with a snake in his room. The doctor sat in his chair. He was looking into the mirror. He appreciated his own looks. He made two decisions. One, he would shave daily and grow thin moustache to look more handsome, and secondly, he would wear a permanent smile on his face. Suddenly, a snake landed on his shoulder and coiled around his left arm above the elbow. Its hood was only three or four inches away from his face. The doctor turned into a stone and did not move. But his mind was active. He prayed to God, the creator of this world and universe. He realised that there was no medicine with him in case the snake bites him. He called himself a stupid doctor.

Suddenly, the snake turned its hood and looked into the mirror. It saw its reflection. The snake unwound itself from his arm and moved closer to the mirror. Perhaps it wanted to enjoy its beauty in the mirror. The doctor got a chance to run away.

The story has a humorous ending. Next day, the doctor returned to the room with his friend. He had decided to vacate the room immediately. He did not want to live in that room any more. He had come to move his things from there. But he found that some thief had already taken away everything except his dirty vest.



NCERT Questions

Thinking About the Text

I. Discuss in pairs and answer each question below in a short paragraph (30 - 40 words).

1. "The sound was familiar one." What sound did the doctor hear? What did he think it was? How many times did he hear it? (Find the places in the text). When and why did the sounds stop?

The doctor lived in a room which was full of rats. He heard the sounds of the rats. There was a regular traffic of rats to and fro the beam. He heard the sound thrice. The sound stopped suddenly as rats had seen a snake.

2. What two "important" and "earth-shaking" decisions did the doctor take while he was looking into the mirror?

The doctor took two "important" and "earth-shaking" decisions while he was looking into the mirror. First, he decided to shave daily and grow a thin moustache. Second, always to keep an attractive smile on his face.

3. "I looked into the mirror and smiled," says the doctor. A little later he says, "I forgot my danger and smiled feebly at myself". What is the doctor's opinion about himself when: (i) he first smiles, and (ii) he smiles again? In what way do his thoughts change in between, and why?

i) When the doctor first smiles, he has an inflated opinion of himself, admiring his looks and profession.

ii) In the second instance, the doctor smiles at his foolishness and helplessness.

His thoughts change after his encounter with the snake—from being a proud doctor he moves on to accept his stupidity.

II. This story about a frightening incident is narrated in a humorous way. What makes it humorous? (Think of the contrasts it presents between dreams and reality. Some of them are listed below.)

1. (i) The kind of person the doctor is (money, possessions)

- (ii) The kind of person he wants to be (appearance, ambition)
- 2. (i) The person he wants to marry
(ii) The person he actually marries
- 3. (i) His thoughts when he looks into the mirror
(ii) His thoughts when the snake is coiled around his arm

Write short paragraphs on each of these to get your answer.

- 1. (i) The doctor is a poor person. He has hardly any money. He lives in an unelectrified house. It is small rented room with plenty of rats living in it. He has just started his medical practice. So he is not a man of possessions or money.
(ii) The doctor wants to be rich. He would also like to have good appearance. That's why he decides to grow a thin moustache.
- 2. (i) The doctor wants to marry a woman doctor with good medical practice and a lot of money. She would be fast as not to run after him and catch him.
(ii) He marries a thin reedy woman who has a gift of sprinter.
- 3. (i) His thoughts are full of joy and satisfaction. He decides to grow thin moustache and keep smiling always. He finds his smile attractive.
(ii) He turns to stone. He sets like stone image in the flesh. However, his mind is very active. He feels the great presence of creator. He decides to write the words 'O God' outside his little heart.

Thinking about Language

- 1. Here are some sentences from the text. Say which of them tell you, that the author? (a) was afraid of the snake, (b) was proud of his appearance, (c) had a sense of humour, (d) was no longer afraid of the snake.
 - 1. I was turned to stone.
 - 2. I was no mere image cut in granite.
 - 3. The arm was beginning to be brained of strength.



4. I tried in my imagination to write in bright letters outside my little heart the words, 'O God'.

5. I didn't tremble. I didn't cry out.

6. I looked into the mirror and smiled. It was an attractive smile.

7. I was suddenly a man of flesh and blood.

8. I was after all a bachelor, and a doctor too on top of it!

9. The fellow had such a sense of cleanliness....! The rascal could have taken it and used it after washing it with soap and water.

10. Was it trying to make an important decision about growing a moustache or using eye shadow and mascara or wearing a vermilion spot on its forehead?

a. was afraid of the snake

1. I was turned to stone.

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c. had a sense of humour

8. I was after all a bachelor, and a doctor too on top of it!

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d. was no longer afraid of the snake

7. I was suddenly a man of flesh and blood.



II. Expressions used to show fear

Can you find the expressions in the story that tell you that the author was frightened? Read the story and complete the following sentences.

1. I was turned _____.
2. I sat there holding _____.
3. In the light of the lamp I sat there like _____.

1. I was turned to stone.
2. I sat there holding my breath.
3. In the light of the lamp I sat there like a stone image in the flesh.

III. In the sentences given below some words and expressions are italicised. They are variously mean that one

- Is very frightened.
- Is too scared to move.
- Is frightened by something that happens suddenly.
- Makes another feel frightened.

Match the meanings with the words/expressions in italics, and write the appropriate meaning next to the sentence. The first one has been done for you.

1. I knew a man was following me, I was scared out of my wits. (very frightened)
2. I got a fright when I realised how close I was to the cliff edge.
3. He nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw the bull coming towards him.
4. You really gave me a fright when you crept up behind ne like that.
5. Wait until I tell his story - it will make your hair stand on end.
6. Paralysed with fear, the boy faced his abductors.
7. The boy hid behind the door, not moving a muscle.

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2. I got a fright when I realised how close I was to the cliff edge. (frightened by something that happens suddenly)
3. He nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw the bull coming towards him. (very frightened)
4. You really gave me a fright when you crept up behind me like that. (frightened by something that happens suddenly)
5. Wait until I tell his story - it will make your hair stand on end. (makes another feel frightened)
6. Paralysed with fear, the boy faced his abductors. (too scared to move)
7. The boy hid behind the door, not moving a muscle. (too scared to move)

IV. Report these questions using *if/whether* or *why/when/where/how/which/what*.

Remember the italicised verbs change into the past tense.

1. Meena asked her friend, "*Do you think* your teacher will come today?"
2. David asked his colleague, "*Where* will you go this summer."
3. He asked the little boy, "*Why* he was studying English?"
4. She asked me, "*When* are we going to leave?"
5. Pran asked me, "*Have* you finished reading the newspaper?"
6. Seema asked her, "*How long* have you lived here?"
7. Sheila asked the children "*Are* you ready to do the work?"

1. Meena asked her friend if she thought her teacher would come that day.
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Solved Question Bank

Reference-to-Context Questions

Q. Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow:

1. The sound was a familiar one. One could say that the rats and I shared the room. I took out my box of matches and lighted the kerosene lamp on the table.

The house was not electrified; it was a small rented room. I had just set up medical practice and my earnings were meagre.

a. The familiar sound was that of the _____.

Movement of rats

b. The author was a _____ by profession.

Doctor

c. The author had a small rented room that was not electrified.

True

d. The word that is antonym of 'abundant' in the above passage is _____.

'Meagre'

2. It had a tiled roof with long supporting gables that rested on the beam over the wall.

There was no ceiling. There was a regular traffic of rats to and from the beam. I made my bed and pulled it close to the wall. I lay down but I could not sleep. I got up and went out to the veranda for a little air, but the Wind God seemed to have taken time off.

a. In the doctor's rented room there was no _____.

Roof/ceiling

b. The rats could easily move to and fro the room because of the _____.

Beam

c. The author had gone out to get some fresh air because he did not have fan or cooler in his room.

True



d. The phrase 'the Wind God seemed to have taken time off' means _____.

The wind God must have taken a holiday.

3. One feels tempted to look into a mirror when it is near one. I took a look. In those days I was a great admirer of beauty and I believed in making myself look handsome. I was a doctor. I felt had to make my presence felt. I picked up the comb and ran it through my hair and adjusted the parting so that it looked straight and neat.

a. In order to make his presence felt, the doctor _____.

Adjusted his hair.

b. 'I' took a look _____.

Into a mirror

c. As an old man, the doctor was a great admirer of beauty.

False

d. The synonym of 'Someone who regards with wonder or pleasure' in the passage is _____.

'Admirer'

4. With such thoughts in my mind, I resumed my seat in the chair in front of the table. There were no more sounds from above. Suddenly there came a dull thud as if a rubber tube had fallen to the ground... surely nothing to worry about. Even so I thought I would turn around and take a look. No sooner had I turned than a fat snake wriggled over the back of the chair and landed on my shoulder. The snake's landing on me and my turning was simultaneous.

a. The sound of a 'thus' was as if a _____ had fallen.

Rubber tube

b. Suddenly a _____ came down on the author's shoulder.

Snake

c. The author turned at the same time when the snake perched upon him.

True

d. The word in the passage that means 'to quickly turn and twist' is _____.

'Wriggled'





5. At my slightest movement the snake would strike me! Death lurked four inches away. Suppose it struck, what was the medicine I had to take? There were no medicines in the room. I was but a poor, foolish and stupid. I forgot my danger and smiled feebly at myself.
- a. 'I' in the above lines refers to the _____.
Doctor
- b. He addresses himself as a _____.
Poor, foolish and stupid doctor
- c. His distance from death was just two inches.
False
- d. Pick the word in the passage which means the same as 'something hidden'.
'Lurked'
6. 'Phew!' Each of us heaved a sigh of relief, somebody asked, "Doctor, is your wife very fat?" "No", the doctor said, "God willed otherwise. My life companion is a thin reedy person with the gift of a sprinter."
- a. _____ is an expression which shows a strong reaction of relief.
Phew!
- b. The phrase that means the same as 'to suddenly feel happy as something unpleasant didn't happen' in the passage is _____.
Heave a sigh of relief
- c. The Doctor's wife was very thin and active.
True
- d. _____ is the word that means same as 'a person who takes part in races'.
'Sprinter'
7. The doctor replied, "I ran and ran till I reached a friend's house. Immediately I seared oil all over myself and took a bath. I changed into fresh clothes. The next morning at about eight-thirty, I took my friend and one or two others to my room to move my things from there. But we found we had little to carry. Some thief had





removed most of my things. The room had been cleaned out! But not really, the thief had left behind one thing as a final insult!"

a. The doctor had little to carry from his room because his things _____.

Were removed/stolen

b. Before the author took a bath, he covered himself with _____.

Oil

c. The room was neat because it was swept and mopped by the thieves.

False

d. The antonym of the word 'fresh' is _____.

'Stale'

Short Answer Questions

1. *The sound was a familiar one.* What sound did the doctor hear? What did he think it was?

The doctor heard the second of the snake. He thought it was the sound of rats. He called it a familiar sound because he knew that there were a lot of rats in his house.

2. *What two important and earth-shaking decisions did the doctor take while he was looking into the mirror?*

The doctor was an eligible bachelor. While he was looking into the mirror he took two important and earth-shaking decisions. He decided that he would shave daily and grow a thin moustache and would always keep an attractive smile on his face.

3. *How did the doctor react when he encountered the snake?*

The doctor encountered the snake which had landed on his shoulder. He was scared but showed a great presence of mind. He neither jumped nor cried. He sat on the chair holding his breath. His mind was active though his body was still.

4. *Why did the doctor feel that he was quite near death?*

A snake had landed on doctor's shoulder. It had coiled his left arm above the elbow. Its hood was spread out. It was only four inches away from his face. He could not think of any anti-snakebite medicine too. He thought he was quite near death.



5. What did the doctor think of doing if the snake bit him?

The doctor had a snake landed on his shoulder. He felt as if he was going to be bitten by the snake. He thought of some anti-snakebite medicine. But he could not. He knew that there was no medicine available for him. He called himself a stupid, foolish doctor.

6. What did the doctor think when the snake was looking into the mirror?

The snake left the doctor and sat in front of the mirror. He looked into it. The doctor thought that the snake was admiring its beauty. If it was a male snake, he might be thinking of growing moustache. If it was a female, it might be thinking about using eye shadow, mascara or wear a vermilion on her forehead.

7. Why could the doctor not sleep in his room? What did he do then?

The doctor lived in a rented room. It had no electricity. It was a hot summer night. He got up from his bed and went out to veranda. But he could not sleep there too. He tried to read a book but got no relief.

8. Why did the doctor say that he had to make his presence felt?

The doctor was unmarried. He was a great admirer of beauty. He believed in making himself handsome. While looking into the mirror, he adjusted his hair many times. He also decided to shave daily but keep a thin moustache.

9. What did the doctor think about his future wife?

The doctor decided to marry a lady doctor who should have a good medical practice. She should have a plenty of money. She should be fat as well for if he made any silly mistake, she won't be able to chase and catch him.

Long Answer Questions

1. Did the doctor find his encounter with the snake humorous or frightening or both? What aspects of human nature are revealed here?

The incident in the story is both frightening and humorous. When the snake landed on his shoulder, the doctor was so frightened that he could neither jump nor utter a cry.



The element of humour in the story is that the doctor thinks of marrying a woman doctor with good medical practice. He wishes her to be fat so that in case a silly mistake is made by the doctor, she would not be able to run after him. When the doctor realises that there was no medicine for snakebite, he calls himself a foolish and stupid doctor. The reader smiles when the doctor saw the snake looking into the mirror. He wondered if it was admiring its own beauty. He guessed if it was trying to make an important decision about growing a moustache or using eyeshadow and mascara. It shows that some people have a tendency of keeping their calm even in the worst of situations.

2. Describe the reaction of the doctor when he confronted the snake. Patience and presence of mind are revealed from his behaviour. Discuss.

When the doctor confronted the snake, he behaved in a very balanced way. He did not jump or tremble in fear. He did not even cry. He sat like a statue. He retained his presence of mind as well as his sense of humour. He prayed to God and wrote in bright letters outside his little heart the words, "O God". He forgot his danger and smiled feebly at himself. Soon the snake unwound itself from his arm. The doctor got up from the chair and went out quietly, and ran away to his friend's house. He did not panic. He had great patience and did not move. Soon he found the snake looking into the mirror. The doctor had presence of mind and soon came out of the trouble. Yes, patience and presence of mind always help up in any dangerous condition. One should never panic and should always try to find out a way out of the trouble. Keeping one's cool even in adverse conditions can help a lot.

3. Was the doctor rich? What was his economic condition? Was he happy? Do you think wealth and happiness go together?

No, the doctor was not rich. His economic condition was not good. He lived in a rented house. His room was very small. It was not electrified. His room was tiled and it had no ceiling. He had only a few things. He had a few clothes, currency and books. He always wanted to be rich. He dreamed of marrying a rich lady doctor. He always wanted to live a comfortable life but his poverty did not allow him. He had a meagre





income from his practice. The doctor used a kerosene lamp to light his room. All this shows that the doctor led a simple and modest life. Though the doctor was not rich yet he was happy. He had a good sense of humour. He wanted to improve his economic condition but was never sad. In my opinion, happiness is a state of mind and it has nothing to do with wealth.

4. What was the final insult? Why did the doctor feel insulted? What should he have done to avoid the insult?

The doctor moved after the snake had unwound itself and crept towards the mirror. The doctor moved out of his room and ran towards his friend's house to escape from the snake without securing his possessions in the room. He rubbed oil and took a bath. Next morning when he came back with some people to find the snake and take his luggage away, he did not find the snake. In fact, he found nothing there. Some thief had cleaned his room completely. But the thief left his vest behind. It was a soiled undergarment that the fastidious doctor thought below his dignity to take away.

5. Why did the doctor, according to you, keep on looking into the mirror? How important is appearance in your opinion? Should we spend time in making ourselves look handsome?

Being a bachelor, the doctor always wanted to look handsome. He was a great admirer of beauty. I think this was the reason why the doctor kept on looking into the mirror. Not only this, he thought of various ways to look handsome. In my opinion, appearance is very important in one's life. One should keep oneself presentable. Personal hygiene is very important. People don't like dirty, shabby people. But at the same time we should not waste much time in making ourselves look handsome. There is no point in visiting parlours or salons for artificial make-up. Along with appearance, the beauty of character is also very important.

6. Do you think keeping a smile on the face makes a person more handsome? How?

Yes, in my opinion, keeping a smile on the face makes a person more handsome. In the story, the doctor wanted to look more handsome, so he decided to shave daily





and keep a smile on his face. He believed that wearing an attractive smile on his face all the time would make him look more handsome. In fact, he was an admirer of beauty. People are impressed if you have a smiling face. Face is the index of mind, so smile on a face is an ornament. It sends positive vibes all around. Even an angry person gets positive energy if he smiles. It makes work easy and helps in winning over the people. One should always wear a smile on one's face.



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