



Grade IX

Lesson 7 : The Last Leaf

- O. Henry

Supplementary Reader

Soul of the Chapter

The story 'The Last Leaf' is a story of supreme sacrifice by an old artist. The old artist Behrman paints a masterpiece to keep someone's hopes and willpower alive. He dies in this good cause. His sacrifice fulfils his ambition of creating a masterpiece too. Johnsy and Sue were two young artists. They shared a small room on the third floor of an old house. Johnsy fell ill in November. She had pneumonia. Sue sent for a doctor. The doctor declared that Johnsy had lost the will to live. No medicine could help her.

Johnsy fancied that she would die soon. She linked her life to the falling leaves of an ivy creeper. She began to think that she would die with the fall of the last leaf. Her condition went from bad to worse each day.

Sue was much worried and wanted to help her. She tried her best to revive Johnsy's interest in life. But she failed. Sue told this problem to their common friend, Behrman. Behrman was not a successful artist. He always desired to make a masterpiece. When he learnt about the fanciful idea of Johnsy, he decided something and went out in the rain. He painted a true painting of the last green ivy leaf. It did not fall in the rain storm. It looked so real that it made Johnsy believe that neither it nor her life would end. She improved and regained faith in her life.

Sue told Johnsy all about Behrman who sacrificed his life for saving her life. Behrman died of pneumonia. He made a supreme sacrifice.

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NCERT Questions

Think About It

1. What is Johnsy's illness? What can cure her, the medicine or the willingness to live?

Johnsy was suffering from pneumonia. Only the willingness to live could cure her. She had made up her mind that she was not going to get well. The doctor said that if she did not want to live, then medicines would not help her.

2. Do you think the feeling of depression Johnsy has is common among teenagers?

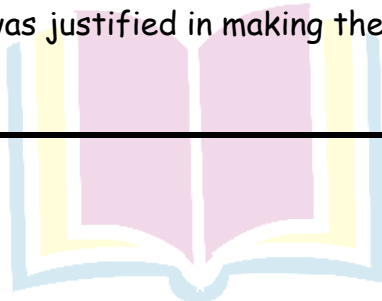
Yes, the fear Johnsy has, is common among the teenagers. Johnsy was under depression. She had lost her interest in life. The young minds are immature, sensitive and emotionally unstable. They cannot cope with the demanding competition in their lives. They want to perform but if there is any failure, they go into depression.

3. Behrman has a dream. What is it? Does it come true?

Behrman has a dream. He wanted to create a painting which would be his masterpiece. Yes, his dream comes true when he paints the last leaf of the ivy creeper to keep the hopes of a young girl alive though he had to lose his life doing so.

4. What is Behrman's masterpiece? What makes Sue say so?

Behrman was an old artist. His masterpiece was the painting of an ivy leaf. The leaf looked so real that even the artist like Johnsy could not realise its genuineness. She thought that it was a real leaf. This leaf was a masterpiece in the sense that it saved the life of a girl. Sue was justified in making the statement.



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Short Answer Type Questions**1. Who were Sue and Johnsy and how were they living?**

Sue and Johnsy were two young artists. Their economic condition was not good. They were strugglers. They lived in the artist colony. They shared a small flat. They both were good friends.

2. What did the doctor say about Johnsy's chances of recovery?

Johnsy had pneumonia. Due to some financial crisis, she got depressed and lost faith in life. The doctor said that she would not recover unless she had a wish to live. Her willingness to live could save her.

3. Why did Johnsy link her death to the last leaf?

Johnsy was emotionally disturbed. She developed a belief that she would die with the fall of the last leaf on the creeper. She started counting the leaves. In fact, she had an attack of depression too.

4. How did Behrman react to Johnsy's fancy?

When Behrman came to know about Johnsy's belief regarding the fall of leaves, he saw the creeper and realised that the last leaf was sure to fall. He said nothing and went out. He decided to do something to save her life. It was his masterpiece that saved Johnsy.

5. What sacrifice did Behrman make for Johnsy?

Behrman was an old artist. He knew that the last leaf was sure to fall that night. He decided to paint a leaf on the wall. It was a stormy night. It was raining heavily. But Behrman completed the job. He caught pneumonia and died.

6. How did Behrman die?

Behrman was an old artist of sixty years. While painting the leaf on the wall, he was completely drenched. He caught pneumonia and died. But before his death, he was successful in fulfilling his dream of making a masterpiece.

Long Answer Type Questions

1. Most of the teenagers today have baseless fear like Johnsy had in the story "The Last Leaf". It is very common among the teenagers who go into depression. Sue, as a good friend, helps Johnsy in coming out of the situation. According to you, what role can the peer group play in such conditions?

Most teenagers today have baseless fear like Johnsy had in the story 'The Last Leaf'. Sometimes it leads them to depression. Johnsy had developed a fancy idea. She linked her life to the falling leaves of an Ivy creeper. She began to think that she would die with the fall of the last leaf. Her condition went from bad to worse each day. Sue was worried about her health. She tried all medicines but all in vain. She knew that Johnsy was in depression. In a situation of depression, peer group plays a very important role. The patient needs positive moral support. Any negative treatment would worsen the situation. She handled the situation intelligently. She convinced Behrman to make an artificial leaf in the window. The leaf looked so real that it made Johnsy believe that her life would not end. It changed her mindset. It was the peer group that helped her in coming out of depression.

2. What did Johnsy believe about the falling leaves? Did Sue believe the same thing? But at the same time, she does not argue with Johnsy and contradicts her belief. She comforts her. Do you think a good friend should have all these qualities in his/her character?

Johnsy had an attack of pneumonia. She had lost all interest in life. An ivy creeper was growing against the wall of a neighbouring house. It was autumn and the leaves of the creeper were falling. Johnsy linked the falling of leaves to her life. She thought that with the falling of each leaf, she was nearing her death. Sue told her that there could be no relationship between falling leaves and her life. But, at the same time, Sue did not argue with Johnsy and did not contradict her belief. It shows the maturity and understanding of human nature. It was her maturity and willingness to help her friend in her bad time. She convinced Behrman to help her. She left no stone unturned in saving Johnsy's life. A good friend should always be like Sue who is mature, sincere and understanding.



3. Behrman sacrificed his life for someone he did not know. It was a supreme sacrifice, a selfless service. Discuss.

Behrman was an old artist, when he came to know about the fanciful idea of Johnsy about the leaf, he decided to help her. He knew that the last leaf would fall in the stormy night. He did not know Johnsy personally but decided to help her. When Sue told him the whole story of Johnsy he decided to paint the leaf on the wall facing the window during the stormy night. He succeeded in his mission and saved the precious life of a young artist. But he caught pneumonia and died of it. It was a supreme sacrifice by the old artist. In my opinion, people like Behrman, who sacrifice for other, never die. Their art is immortal. They live in our heart forever. It is a rare virtue in one's character. His noble act is an example of extraordinary gesture of humanity.

4. Willingness to live is more important than medication. Do you agree?

Willingness to live is more important than medication. It is true where there is a will there is a way. Johnsy was suffering from pneumonia which could be cured by medication but she had lost the will to live which could not be cured by medicines. It was only the willingness that could cure her. One should never give up hope. I learn from her story that willingness to live is more important than medication. If we are ill we should never give up hope to live. Even if medication fails, willingness to live and faith in God keep us alive. Sue and Behrman generated hope and willingness in Johnsy which revived her from her serious illness.

5. Discuss Sue's role in saving the life of her friend, Johnsy. What qualities of the character of Sue are revealed that impress you?

Without Sue's efforts, Johnsy would not have recovered. When Johnsy fell ill, Sue did everything for her recovery. When Sue realised Johnsy's depression and reluctance to live, she diverted her attention by talking about clothes, fashion, etc. Sue tried to convince Johnsy that the falling leaves had nothing to do with her life. It was a natural phenomenon during autumn. She discussed the whims of Johnsy with Behrman who created a leaf on the wall. It saved her life. In all, it was Sue, who inspired Behrman to paint a leaf and save Johnsy's life. Maturity, wisdom, resourcefulness, concern, love and affection for a friend are the values that make Sue a true friend and a good human being.





- 6. Sometimes people have deceptive appearances and their gruff exteriors hide a generous heart. Find traits in Behrman's character to prove this point.**

Behrman was a sixty-year-old unsuccessful painter, who lived in the same building as Sue and Johnsy and made his living by working as a live model for the other painters in the building. He was a day-dreamer in regard to his artistic skills and hoped to paint a masterpiece some day. He was a rational person otherwise, and scoffed at superstitions. Thus he questioned Johnsy's superstitious belief about dying when the last ivy leaf fell. He was capable of extreme sacrifices and painted an ivy leaf on the wall in the rain because that would assuage Johnsy's superstitious belief and give her the strength of spirit to want to live on. He was a quiet and unassuming person who did not like advertising his deeds and made the supreme sacrifice of his life by going out on a rainy night and painting the ivy leaf masterpiece that saved a human life.

- 7. Johnsy, in the story 'The Last Leaf', was an ideal roommate to Sue. How far do you agree? Find character traits in her to prove or disprove this point.**

Johnsy was a struggling painter by profession, who shared lodgings with a fellow painter Sue, in a flat on the third floor of an old building. She was a companionable flat mate when she was keeping well and the two shared common interests in food and fashions.

Johnsy was a bad patient and when she fell ill with pneumonia, she lost her spirit and reconciled herself to die. She was a superstitious person, and believed that her life would end when the last leaf on the ivy creeper outside her window, fell. She was quick to realize her faults and worked hard towards mending her ways. Thus when she saw the leaf clinging to the creeper she realized that she had been irrational and a source of trouble to her roommate. Thus Johnsy a self-motivated and reformed individual now, who strove hard to quash her weaknesses and rise above superstition.

- 8. The story "The Last Leaf" is a story of supreme sacrifice by an old artist. Do you agree? What makes a masterpiece – money value or the supreme sacrifice?**

Behrman was a poor old artist. He wanted to draw a masterpiece but he never got a unique idea for that. Once Johnsy, a young artist, fell ill seriously and developed a fanciful belief that she would die with the fall of the last leaf on the creeper outside her window. Behrman painted the last leaf in the stormy night. He himself got fever and fell down with pneumonia. He died two days after painting the leaf. It saved Johnsy's life but took away the old painter's life. It was a supreme sacrifice of the old artist. The last leaf painted by him became his masterpiece. It was a masterpiece





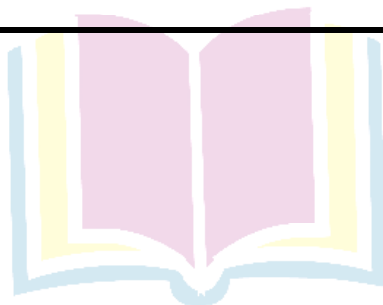
not because of its monetary or artistic value. It was because it saved someone's life. It was a symbol of sacrifice by an artist for another one. It is not the money value that makes the work great, it is the motive behind the work that makes it great.

9. "A friend in need is a friend indeed." Do you think the story 'The Last Leaf' supports this statement? Explain with reference to Sue.

It is true that a real friend is one who helps you in need. In the story, Sue and Johnsy were good friends and artists. Sue was always with Johnsy who was suffering from pneumonia and had lost her will to live. Johnsy believed that she would die with the falling of the last leaf on the ivy creeper. Sue tried to instil in her a desire to live a happy life. She was optimistic and always remained a constant companion to Johnsy. Sue shared it with Behrman and both of them helped Johnsy in regaining her wish to live in their own ways. Sue proves that a true friend is one who we can turn to in our times of trouble. He/She never disappoints us. Thus, the story "The Last Leaf" supports the given statement.

10. According to you, what saved Johnsy, the medicine or her willingness to live?

It is the determination and strong willpower that helps a patient recover sooner. Johnsy felt dejected and depressed due to the attack of pneumonia. She had lost her will to live. Medicine was ineffective. She thought that she would die with the fall of the last leaf on the ivy creeper. But Behrman and Sue brought her out of this pessimistic idea and convinced her that there was no relationship between her life and the falling of the leaf. Moreover, Behrman painted a leaf so beautiful and so natural that would exist for ever. Thus, her willingness to live saved her. In fact, a person with strong willpower and determination can do anything.



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