



Grade IX

Lesson 9 : The Accidental Tourist

- *Bill Bryson*

Soul of the Chapter

Supplementary Reader

'The Accidental Tourist' is a humorous story. The narrator, Bill Bryson, narrates his experiences as an air traveller. There were many things that he could not do properly. He was a confused person. He goes many times to find lavatory in a cinema but ends up standing in an alley on the wrong side of self-locking door. He often forgets the number of his hotel room and goes two or three times a day at the hotel reception to enquire about it.

Once he went to England with his family for a week on Easter. On the airport he remembered that he had a discount card in his carry bag. He tried to open the bag and pulled the zip harder. The zip broke and the bag opened abruptly. Everything in his bag rained out and spread here there. His wife was shocked to find her husband so absent-minded.

He had many such experiences while on board. Once he was in a helpless crash position when he leaned over to tie his shoe laces and someone in the seat ahead of him threw his seat back into full recline. On another occasion, he knocked soft drinks into the lap of a lady sitting beside him. The worst experience he had was when he got his mouth, chin, gums and tongue blue coloured. He was writing some thoughts on a paper. He fell into conversation with a lady sitting next to him. He had put his pen in his mouth. It leaked and his mouth was covered with ink. He did not realise it until he went to the lavatory.

The narrator was so fed up with his eating habits that he preferred not to eat while on board. His wife used to take some precautions. She told the children to "take the lid off the food for daddy" or put their hoods up when daddy cut his meat.

He often forgot to ask for flyer miles. He could never take benefits from the discount schemes. It was his state of mind that he missed a golden opportunity to avail himself of first class flight to Bali.



NCERT Questions

Think About It

1. Bill Bryson says, "I am, in short, easily confused." What examples has he given to justify this?

Bill Bryson was easily confused. Many times while searching a lavatory in a cinema, he ended up standing on the wrong side of a self-locking door in an alley. He used to forget his room number. He has to go to the reception at least two or three times a day to enquire about his room number.

2. What happens when the zip on his carry-on bag gives way?

The author tried to open his bag forcefully. The side of the bag flew open and all his items fell out in the open. Newspaper cuttings, tobacco packet, passport, money, etc. rained out over an area about the size of a tennis court.

3. Why is his finger bleeding? What is his wife's reaction?

The author tried to open his carry bag to find out his discount card. The zip got jammed. He tried to open it and got a long deep cut in his finger. It started bleeding. His wife looked at him with an expression of wonder. She remarked, "I can't believe you do this for a living."

4. How does Bill Bryson end up in a "Crash position" in the aircraft?

Bill Bryson leaned over to tie shoe laces, just at the moment someone in the seat ahead of him pushed his seat back into full recline. He was hit badly and found himself pinned helplessly in the crash position. He could get out of this position only by clawing to the leg of the passenger sitting beside him.

5. Why are his teeth and gums navy blue?

Bill Bryson was writing some important thoughts in a notebook. In between he was sucking on the end of his pen. He fell into conversation with an attractive lady. He amused the lady for more than twenty minutes. He did not realise that his pen had leaked. When he retired to the lavatory, he found his teeth and gums navy blue.

6. Bill Bryson "ached to be suave". Is he successful in his mission? List his 'unsuave' ways.

Bill Bryson tried to open his bag in a polished way but the zip gave away and his paper and other items fell around. There was always an accident on the plane. He got hit badly while trying to tie his shoe laces. He knocked soft drink twice onto the lap



of a sweet lady sitting beside him. He painted his teeth and gums navy blue with his leaking pen. He used to get into a car and close the door without taking his full coat inside the car. Sometimes he used to sit on a chewing gum, ice cream, cough syrup and motor oil. This type of behaviour is not acceptable in anyway. It makes a person lose his dignity. One should always be well mannered.

7. Why do you think Bill Bryson's wife says to the children, "Take the lids off the food for Daddy"?

She knew if Bill was left to take off the lids himself, he would spill the contents and either spoil his own clothes or the clothes of those who were around him. She always told her children to take the lids off the food for daddy to avoid any embarrassing incidents.

8. What is the significance of the title?

Bill Bryson narrates humorously his experiences as a tourist. 'Accidental' means 'happening by chance'. The narrator relates his experiences in the story. All the incidents, he narrates, are accidental happenings. The story is full of chance happenings in the life of the author. Hence, the title of the story is appropriate.

Solved Question Bank

Short Answer Questions

1. Why did the author have to return to a hotel desk frequently?

The author was a confused person. He used to forget things frequently. While staying in a hotel, he used to forget his room number. He had to return to the hotel desk frequently to ask what his room number was.

2. What did the author want to get out of his carry bag at the London airport?

The author had joined 'British Airways' frequent flyer programme. On reaching London with his family, he remembered that he had put the card in his carry bag. He wanted to take it out of the bag to avail himself of the discount.





3. What were the things that rained out of his bag at the airport?

When the author tried to open his bag, the zip got jammed. He pulled it harder. It broke and the bag opened abruptly. It had newspaper cutting, tin of pipe tobacco, magazines, passport, money, films, etc. which rained out of the bag.

4. Why did the author cry, "My finger! My finger!"?

While opening the bag, the zip got jammed. He tried to open it forcefully. His finger got a sharp cut and started bleeding. When he saw blood coming out of the finger, he started crying "My finger, my finger!"

5. Why did the lady in the plane look at the author with a stupefied expression?

Being absent-minded, the author knocked a soft drink onto the lap of a sweet lady sitting beside him. She ignored it as an accident and said nothing. But when the same incident was repeated immediately, she looked at the author with a stupefied expression.

6. Why does the author not eat or drink while travelling alone?

The author always does a liquid mischief while eating or drinking in a flight. He had faced many awkward and embarrassing situations while on the flight. Once he spilt the cold drink on a lady's dress. Hence, he does not eat or drink while travelling alone.

Long Answer Questions

1. Bill Bryson is a confused person and irritates his fellows, yet he is loveable. What are the qualities in his character that make him loveable?

Or

Give a brief character sketch of Bill Bryson. 'The Accidental Tourist', stating the reason for your liking of his.

Bill Bryson is easily confused. While travelling by air, he always does one or another liquid mischief. When he goes to a lavatory, he ends up standing in an alley. He has to return to the hotel desk frequently just to ask what his room number is. On planes, when the food is delivered, he tries to take extra precaution but every time he does a mistake. He tries to be civilised and polite but he fails. He is not





calculative. He fails to get benefits from the airlines scheme. Bill Bryson, no doubt irritates his fellow passengers and family members yet he is loved by all. It is because he has good manners. He is courteous to all. He is polite and always asks for apology. His gentlemanliness makes him a lovable character.

- 2. Bill Bryson 'ached to be suave'. What were the things that he wanted to do but could not succeed in? What does it show about his character? Would you call him careless?**

Bill Bryson always wanted to rise from a dinner table without hitting anything but he always broke one or another things on the table. He wanted to get in a car without leaving 14 inches of coat outside. He wanted to wear light-coloured trousers without discovering at the end of the day that he had at various times sat on chewing gum, ice cream, cough syrup and motor oil. But he could never do these things. He never got his frequent flyer miles. It shows that Bill Bryson is a confused person. No, he can't be called a careless person. He does not act carelessly. He tries to do the things in a systematic way but it always turns to be 'an accidental act'. He was in fact a simpleton who needed to learn more practical ways of life. One must not be too simple to be called as careless.

- 3. Bill Bryson must fly 1,00,000 miles a year but he did not get his air miles. Why? How does absentmindedness result in loss? Explain with reference to the story.**

Bill Bryson was a forgetful person. He had joined the frequent flyer programme of various airlines, he travelled by. But he always forgot to ask for the entry of the mileage in the card with the result that he had travelled about 1 lakh miles in a year but had only 212 miles on his record, that too divided among twenty-three airlines. This had become a real frustration for him. Everyone, he knew, was entitled for a first-class flight to Bali but he could not collect his points because of his absentmindedness. Absentmindedness is a personality trait which may result in irreparable loss. Bill Bryson suffers from financial loss due to his absentmindedness. One should be alert to gain in life.

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