

**Hornbill-1**

**The Portrait of a Lady**

**Short Answer Questions**

1. ***What stories of the grandmother did the author treat as ‘Fables’ of the Prophets? Why?***

**.** The author treated the stories of grandmother’s youth and beauty as fables as he had always seen her old and he found it was hard to accept that she could once be pretty and young.

1. ***Did the narrator like his grandmother telling him of the games she played as a child? If not, why?***

**Ans.** The grandmother often told her grandson about the games she played as a child. Her stories looked quite funny. She looked childish. The narrator didn’t take them very seriously.

1. ***Why did the grandmother keep one hand on her waist?***

**Ans.** The grandmother was very old. She was slightly bent. She had to keep one of her two hands on her waist. She did so to balance her stoop.

1. ***Explain. “As for my grandmother being young and pretty, the thought was almost revolting?”***

**Ans.** The narrator’s grandmother was terribly old. She could not appear young and beautiful. Her face was a criss-cross of wrinkles. She was short, fat and slightly bent. The very idea of her being young and pretty did not appeal to the mind.

1. ***How long had the narrator known his grandmother ‘old and wrinkled’? What did people say? How did the narrator react?***

**Ans.** The narrator had known his grandmother to be old and wrinkled for the last twenty years. She was terribly old. Perhaps she could not become older. People said that she had once been young and pretty. They said that she even had a husband. The narrator found it hard to believe.

1. ***Explain. “Old, so terribly old that she could not have grown older ……”***

**Ans.** The grandmother looked extremely old. She couldn’t have grown older anymore. She looked the same terribly old lady for the last twenty years.

1. ***Why did the grandmother hate music?***

**Ans.** The grandmother actually hated music. She thought that music was meant only for prostitutes and beggars. Music was not meant for school children from respectable families. It was not meant for gentle folk.

1. ***The narrator’s grandmother looked like ‘the winter landscape in the mountains. Comment.***

**Ans.** The grandmother always wore spotless white clothes. Her locks of hair also looked silver white. Her spotless white dress and silver white hair made her look like the snowy mountains in winter. It is also because she exuberated peace and tranquillity like the mountains.

1. ***The grandmother had a divine beauty. How does the author bring it out?***

**Ans.** The grandmother’s silvery locks scattered untidily over her pale and wrinkled face. This made her look like an expanse of pure white serenity. She had a divine beauty. She looked like the winter landscape in the mountains.

1. ***How were the grandmother and the narrator good and intimate friends?***

**Ans.** Actually, both of them were like good and intimate friends, she woke him up early in the morning and got him ready for school. She gave him a breakfast of stale bread with a little butter and sugar spread on it. She accompanied him to his school.

1. ***Why did the grandmother accompany the narrator to his school? What did she do there?***

**Ans.** The grandmother accompanied her grandson to his school. Actually, the school was attached to a temple. She sat inside the temple reading scriptures while he studied at the school.. They came back home when the school was over.

1. ***What did the priest teach at the village school?***

**Ans.** The priest taught the alphabet and the morning prayer at the village school. He made the students stand in rows on either side. They would sing the alphabet and the morning prayer in a chorus.

1. ***Describe the feeding of village dogs by the grandmother.***

**Ans.** When the grandmother and the narrator would walk back home together, the village dogs met them at the temple door. They followed them. The grandmother would throw chapattis to them. The dogs would growl and fight with each other for the crumbs.

1. ***What was the turning point in their friendship?***

**Ans.** The narrator’s parents brought them to the city. It was the turning point in their friendship. The city life and English school made all the difference. She didn’t accompany him to his school. Nor could she help him in his studies. They saw less of each other now.

1. ***What opinion did the grandmother form of the English school in the city?***

**Ans.** The grandmother didn’t like the English school in the city. She was sad as they didn’t teach anything about God and scriptures at the school. Nor was she interested in Science. She hated music lessons given in the school.

1. ***How was the common link of friendship between the grandmother and the grandson snapped?***

**Ans.** When the narrator’s family shifted to the city, the grandmother couldn’t accompany him to the school as she used to do in the village. Now he would go by motor bus. She was not able to help the grandson in his studies also. Thus the common link between their friendship snapped.

1. ***Draw a comparison between village school education and city school education***.

**Ans.** Elementary education was given in the village school. The pupils were taught alphabets and multiplication tables. It was quite simple confined to reading, writing and arithmetic. In the city school, English, Science and Music were taught. Unlike the village school there was no teaching about God and the scriptures.

1. ***What were the happiest moments of the day for the grandmother?***

**Ans.** The grandmother would sit in the verandah breaking the bread into little bits for the sparrows. Hundreds of sparrows would gather around her. They would perch on her legs, shoulders and even on the head. It was the happiest half-an-hour of the day for her.

1. ***When did the common link of friendship between the narrator and his grandmother finally snap?***

**Ans.** The narrator went to the university. Now he was given a room of his own. This separated the narrator from his grandmother. The common link of their friendship was thus finally broken.

1. ***How did the grandmother react when the narrator decided to go abroad? Was she upset?***

**Ans.** The grandmother appeared to be quite normal. She knew that her grandson would be away for five years. She looked composed and didn’t show any emotion. She came to see him off at the station. She kissed him lightly on his forehead before departing.

1. ***Why did the narrator think that the grandmother’s kiss was the last sign of physical contact between them?***

**Ans.** The grandmother kissed the forehead of the narrator before he left for abroad. The narrator considered it the last sign of physical contact between them. He never expected his old grandmother to live for five more years, the time when he would be back.

1. ***How did the grandmother celebrate the home coming of his grandson?***

**Ans.** The grandmother was really very much excited and happy when the narrator returned from abroad. She celebrated his arrival by collecting the women of the neighbourhood in the evening. She continued beating an old drum and sang for hours. She even forgot to pray.

1. ***Why did the grandmother stop talking to anybody before her death?***

**Ans.** The old lady fell ill. She had a mild fever. The doctor told them that she would be all right soon. But the grandmother declared that her end was near. She had forgotten to pray the last evening. She was not going to waste any more time talking to them.

1. ***Why didn’t the sparrows take any notice of the bread crumbs thrown to them. How would you explain their strange behaviour at the death of the grandmother?***

**Ans.** The sparrows expressed their grief at the death of the grandmother. They sat around her dead body mourning her death. They didn’t chirp. Nor did they touch the bread crumbs thrown to them by the narrator’s mother. They flew away quietly when the dead body was carried off.

1. ***How did the sparrows mourn the death of the grandmother?***

**Ans.** The sparrows joined the mourning along with other family members. They sat in hundreds around her dead body. They didn’t chirp. Nor did they touch the crumbs of bread thrown to them. They flew away quietly when the dead body was carried off for cremation.

1. ***What is the significance of sparrows in grandmothers life?***

**Ans.** When grandmother shifted to the city, she spent half an hour everyday feeding the sparrows. The birds became very friendly with her and came everyday in the verandah of her house. It was the happiest hour of the day. When she died after her short illness, hundreds of sparrows flew in the verandah and sat near her body. They were quiet and not chirping. They even ignored the bread crumbs given by the author’s mother. In this way they expressed their grief and their bonding with the grandmother.

1. ***What does Khushwant Singh describe in ‘The Portrait of a Lady’?***

**Ans.** In ‘The Portrait of a Lady’ Khushwant Singh draws a pen picture of his grandmother. He describes how he spent his childhood with her in the village. He also describes the changes that came in their relationship in the city.

1. ***Grandmother never complained about anything. Her patience was beyond any measure. Mention any two instances.***

**Ans.** Two instances that show the grandmother’s patience are:

1. When she fed the sparrows the birds used to sat on her head but she never shooed them away.
2. She did not become upset when the author went abroad for higher education. She accepted the decision in a calm and composed manner
3. ***Why was it hard for the author to believe that the grandmother was once young and pretty?***It was difficult for the author to believe that his grandmother was once young and pretty. In fact, the thought was almost revolting. He had seen her old for the last twenty years. He felt she could age no further. The very thought of her playing games as a child seemed quite absurd and undignified.
4. **The grandmother has been portrayed as a very religious lady. What details in the story create this impression?**The author recalls his grandmother as a very religious woman. He remembers her hobbling about the house, telling the beads of her rosary. He recalls her morning prayers and her reading scriptures inside the temple. The author recounts how, during the last few days, she spent all her time praying.
5. **The grandmother had a divine beauty. How does the author bring it out?**The grandmother was not pretty but had a divine beauty. She dressed in spotless white. Her silver locks were scattered untidily over her pale, puckered face, and her lips constantly moved in an inaudible prayer. The author describes her “like the winter landscape in the mountains”a personification of “serenity, breathing peace and contentment.”
6. ***What proofs do you find of friendship between the grandmother and grandson in the story?***  
   The grandmother and grandson were good friends. She got him ready and walked him to and back from school. In the city, they shared a common bedroom. The author’s grandmother saw him off, silently, but kissing him on his forehead, when he went abroad and celebrated his return five years later.
7. ***The grandmother was a kind-hearted woman. Give examples in support of your answer***.  
   The grandmother was a kind-hearted woman. On her way back from school, she would feed the village dogs with stale chapattis. In the city, when she could not move out, she took to feeding sparrows that came and perched on her legs, shoulders, and head.
8. ***“This was the turning point in our friendship.” What was the turning point?***The turning point in the friendship arrived when they shifted to the city. They saw less of each other as she could neither accompany him to school, nor understand English. She did not believe in science. She could not keep pace with the author’s modem education that he received in the city school.
9. ***Draw a comparison between the author’s village school education and city school education***.  
   The village school was attached to a temple and the students were taught the alphabet and morning prayers. The author and his grandmother walked to the school in the village. However, in the city he went by the school bus. He was taught science and English but not taught about god. He was also taught music.
10. ***What was the happiest moment of the day for the grandmother?***  
    The happiest moment of the day for the grandmother in the city was when she was feeding the sparrows. They perched on her legs, shoulders, and head but she never shooed them away.
11. ***What was ‘the last sign’ of physical contact between the author and the grandmother? Why did the author think that to be the last physical contact?***  
    Answer:  
    The author was going abroad for five years. His grandmother kissed his forehead. He presumed this as the last sign of physical contact between them. He feared that she would not survive till he returned since he was going away for five years.
12. ***Everybody including the sparrows mourned the grandmother’s death. Elaborate.***When the grandmother died, thousands of sparrows collected and sat in the courtyard. There was no chirruping. When the author’s mother threw some breadcrumbs for them, they took no notice of the breadcrumbs. They were full of grief at her death and flew away quietly after the cremation.
13. ***Describe the author’s grandfather as he looked in his portrait.***In the portrait, the grandfather was dressed in big turban and loose-fitting clothes. His long white beard covered the best part of his chest and he looked at least a hundred years old. He looked grandfatherly to the author; someone who could never have been young.

***41. How does the author describe his grandmother?***The author describes his grandmother as short, old, fat and slightly bent. To him, she looked the same for twenty years. It was difficult for him to imagine her young and pretty. But he found a beauty in her old age, like the serene winter landscape.

**42. *How does the author react to the idea of the grandmother being young at a point of time and playing games?***  
The author could not conceive his grandmother as young and pretty, and playing games as a little girl. To him, it was like one of the myths and fables she told him.

**43. *How did the grandmother prepare the author for going to school?***The grandmother woke him up each morning, bathed him, dressed him and got him ready for school. Thereafter, she plastered his wooden slate, gave him breakfast and walked him to school. While the author sat in the veranda learning the alphabet and morning prayers, the grandmother sat inside the temple reading scriptures.

***44. Why was the grandmother distressed by the education imparted in the city school?***  
The grandmother disapproved of the author’s education in the English school; they were taught science. She could not understand English and did not believe in science. It made her unhappy that they were not taught about God. The music lessons in school made her unhappier as she felt it was not meant for the gentle folk.

***45. How did the grandmother react to the fact that the author was being given music lessons? Why?***  
The grandson’s learning music in school made her unhappy as she felt it was not meant for the gentle folk. For her, music had associations with beggars and harlots. She almost stopped speaking to the author.

***46. The grandmother’s reception and send off of her grandson were very touching. Comment.***When the writer went abroad, the grandmother saw him off at the railway station, silently praying and telling her beads, and she kissed his forehead. When he returned, she expressed her joy by collecting women from the neighbourhood, beating the drum and singing for hours of the homecoming of warriors. For the first time she missed her prayers.

***47. When the grandmother was taken ill, how were her views different from the doctor’s?***When the grandmother was taken ill, the doctor felt it was mild fever and would go. But the grandmother thought differently. She felt her end was near. She refused to waste any more time talking instead of spending it in prayers as she sensed that only a few hours remained before her life came to an end.

***48. When people are pious and good, even nature mourns their death. Justify in connection with ‘The Portrait of a Lady’.***When the grandmother died, the sparrows, along with the writer’s family, mourned her death. Thousands of sparrows came and sat quietly all around her dead body. The writer’s mother threw breadcrumbs but the sparrows took no notice of them. After her cremation they flew without touching the crumbs.

***49. How did the grandmother spend her day in the city?***  
The grandmother spent her day from sunrise to sunset at her spinning wheel. She sat spinning and reciting her prayers. It was only in the afternoon that she relaxed for a while to feed the sparrows.

**Long Answer Questions**

1. ***What aspects of old people are highlighted in the chapter “The portrait of a Lady”?***

Khushwant Singh’s story portrays the life of a grandmother who was trying to bring up her grandson in a country where the majority of the people were fighting to make it free from the British. They were still the rulers and as a result whatever they had brought with them, be it English education or English fashion, it was looked upon with doubt and distrust by most of the Indians. Khushwant Singh’s grandmother, being old and uneducated, could not reconcile to the thought of her grandson being taught all the modern subjects like Maths, science, new theories and music. She looked upon these subjects with distrust. Although she did not force her views on her family; she became a recluse. She lived in her own world, winning the wheel the whole day, praying and feeding the sparrows.The writer says that if the old people are not able to understand or accept the changes which take place in society regarding education, thinking, lifestyle etc., they feel isolated. This gives way to a generation gap which can be bridged to some extent by proper understanding by the old as well as the young.

1. ***Trace the interest of the old grandmother in the education of the author. Do you think her concern was misplaced?***

The old grandmother had no formal education. But she was seriously concerned about the education of her grandson. She used to wash and plaster his wooden slate, get the school bag ready and go with him to the school. She even helped him with his lessons in the village. Even in the city, she would ask the boy what he had been taught at school. But she could not understand the English words and laws of science. She felt unhappy to know that there was no teaching about God and scriptures. She was shocked to know about music lessons being taught there. So, she withdrew herself completely. She hated music because she thought it was the monopoly of harlots and beggars. The grandmother belonged to the old-world order. So, her concept of right education was different. Her mindset could not accept any change.Her concern was misplaced because the author had already inculcated the moral values from her and now, he was being taught English and Modern science for a progressive future. This education helped him a great deal in his career in later life.

1. ***Draw a contrast of the lifestyle of the author’s grandmother in the village and in the city. What could be the reasons?***

The author’s grandmother was a very old and gracious lady. She hobbled about in the house, one hand resting on her waist to balance herself. She carried a rosary in her other hand. The author could not believe that she had once been a child playing games or a young lady who was married and had children.In the village, she took complete care of the author. She bathed the link boy in the morning, gave him breakfast. Prepared his wooden slate and inkpot for taking to school. She went with him to the temple school where he was taught the morning prayer and the scriptures. The alphabet by the priest. She sat there and read the scriptures. While going back home both of them threw stale chapattis to the village dogs who followed them. When the two were called to the city, there came a big change in her routine and also in her lifestyle. Her friendship with the author was almost broken. She felt isolated. She accepted it calmly. She made use of her time by reciting prayers, plying the charkha and feeding the sparrows in the afternoon. She loved doing that. The reason for the weakening of the bonds of friendship between the two was that she could not go to school nor help him with his lessons, as now he went to an English school. She did not even approve of what was being taught at school. But her affection for her grandson was as strong as ever. She welcomed his homecoming with songs and music. Circumstances made all the difference as life in the village and in the city were very different.

1. ***Describe how the bond of friendship between the author and his grandmother grew strong and then weak with the passage of time.***

The little boy and his old grandmother became best friends in the village. She gave him the morning bath and breakfast. She went with him to the temple school in the village and they came back home together in the afternoon. But when the two moved to the city, their friendship suffered a crack. It was a turning point in their relationship. The author went to an English school in the city. He went by the school bus. So the grandmother could not accompany him anymore. Now he was being taught science, Maths and English; so she could not help him with his lessons. Moreover, when she heard that music lessons were also being given at school, she felt very disturbed as music had cheap associations for her. Now she saw less of him and withdrew herself. When he went to university, he got a room of his own. The common link of sharing the same room was also broken. She felt isolated. She took to plying the *charkha* and feeding the sparrows.

But her concern and affection for the writer were not affected. She gave him a send-off at the station, received him on coming home and celebrated his arrival with songs and beating the drum. She even forgot to pray that evening.

1. ***Draw a character sketch of Khushwant Singh’s grandmother as portrayed by him in the lesson ‘The Portrait of a Lady’.***

 The narrator’s grandmother was a true picture of love, affection and care. She had all those virtues which grandmother’s generally have for their grandsons. She was highly religious but a conservative lady. The grandmother presented a picture of peace and contentment. Her spotless white dress and her silver white hair gave her spiritual beauty. The grandmother was not physically very attractive. She had deep love and affection for her grandson. She got him ready for school. She accompanied him to his school and came back home with him. She was a very religious lady. She was always telling the beads of her rosary. She had compassion even for animals and birds. She fed the village dogs. She took to feeding the sparrows in the city. But the grandmother was a conservative lady. She didn’t like the English language and Science. She hated music. She associated music with prostitutes and beggars.

1. ***Elaborate on the beautiful bond of love and friendship between the author and his grandmother.***  
   When the author was still young, his parents left for the city leaving him to the care of his grandmother. They were good friends. She woke him up each morning, bathed him, dressed him, plastered his wooden slate, gave him breakfast and walked him to school. While he sat in the veranda learning, the grandmother sat inside the temple reading scriptures.

When they settled in the city, they shared a common bedroom. When the writer was going abroad, she went to the railway station to see him off but did not speak a word, only kissed his forehead. The writer cherished this as their last physical contact as he was going away for five years. But his grandmother was there to receive him back. In the evening, she collected women from the neighbourhood and beat the drum and sang for hours of the homecoming of the warriors. For the first time she missed her prayers.

1. ***Discuss the relevance of the title ‘The Portrait of a Lady’.***  
   Khushwant Singh draws a heart-warming pen-portrait of his grandmother whom he loved and admired. Though not pretty, she was beautiful to the author’s perception. Telling the beads of her rosary while her lips constantly moved in an inaudible prayer, she was like the winter landscape in the mountains serene and content. She shared a special relationship with the author.

She got him ready and walked him to and from school. White he sat in the veranda learning, his grandmother sat inside the temple reading scriptures. The writer recounts his memories of his grandmother when he went abroad and how on his return she collected women from the neighbourhood and beat the drum and sang for hours of the homecoming of the warriors.

For the first time, she missed her prayers. She was a pious soul, who cared for the family, and even dogs and sparrows; her death was mourned by all including the sparrows. The writer, through his portrayal, makes the old lady endearing and unforgettable.

1. ***From a foster mother in the village to a lonely old lady in the city describe the grandmother’s journey through the later part of her life.***When Khushwant Singh was still young, his parents left for the city leaving him to the care of his grandmother. They were good friends. His grandmother tended to him, got him ready and walked him to . school. While Khushwant Singh and the other children sat in the school’s veranda, learning, his grandmother sat inside the attached temple, reading scriptures.

In the city, their friendship underwent a change. The only thing that remained unchanged was their common bedroom. She could not accompany him to school as he went by the school bus. His grandmother did not understand or approve of his ‘city education’ and their communication deteriorated further. Later, when he went to the university, he got a separate room and this severed their bond further. She then spent her day from sunrise to sunset at her spinning wheel. She sat spinning and reciting her prayers. It was only in the afternoon that she relaxed for a while to feed the sparrows.

1. ***The grandmother herself was not formally educated but was serious about the author’s education. How does the text support this?***The grandmother was not formally educated but was serious about the author’s education. She could read the scriptures. She realized the value of education and did not let the author miss school. She woke him up each morning, bathed him, dressed him, plastered his wooden slate, gave him breakfast and walked him to school where he was taught the alphabet and morning prayers. While he sat in the veranda learning, the grandmother read her scriptures.

In the city, she could not accompany him to school as he went by the school bus. He was now in an English school, where they taught science. She could not understand English and did not believe in science. The fact that they were not taught about god made her unhappy. Khushwant Singh’s music lessons in school upset her over its lewd associations. She took an interest in the author’s education.

1. ***Gradually the author and the grandmother saw less of each other and their friendship was broken. Was the distancing deliberate or due to the demands of the situation?***  
   When the author was a young boy, his parents shifted to the city leaving him with his grandmother. They were good friends. She was with him through the day and even accompanied him to and from school. But when his parents had settled in the city, they sent for them. This proved to be a turning point in their friendship. The only thing that remained unchanged was their common bedroom. She could not accompany him to school as he went by the school bus. He was now in an English school, where they taught science. She could not understand English and did not believe in science. The fact that they were not taught about God made her unhappy. His music lessons in school made her feel worse. But it was when he went to the university and got a separate room and that their ties were severed further. This was not deliberate, but the situations adversely affected their relationship.