



THE VILLAGE
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
"We Nurture Dreams"

ON THE FACE OF IT- Susan Hill

Summary:

The play "On the Face of It" brings out the idea that people who have a handicap/physical impairment of some kind generally suffer from a sense of loneliness and mental pain.

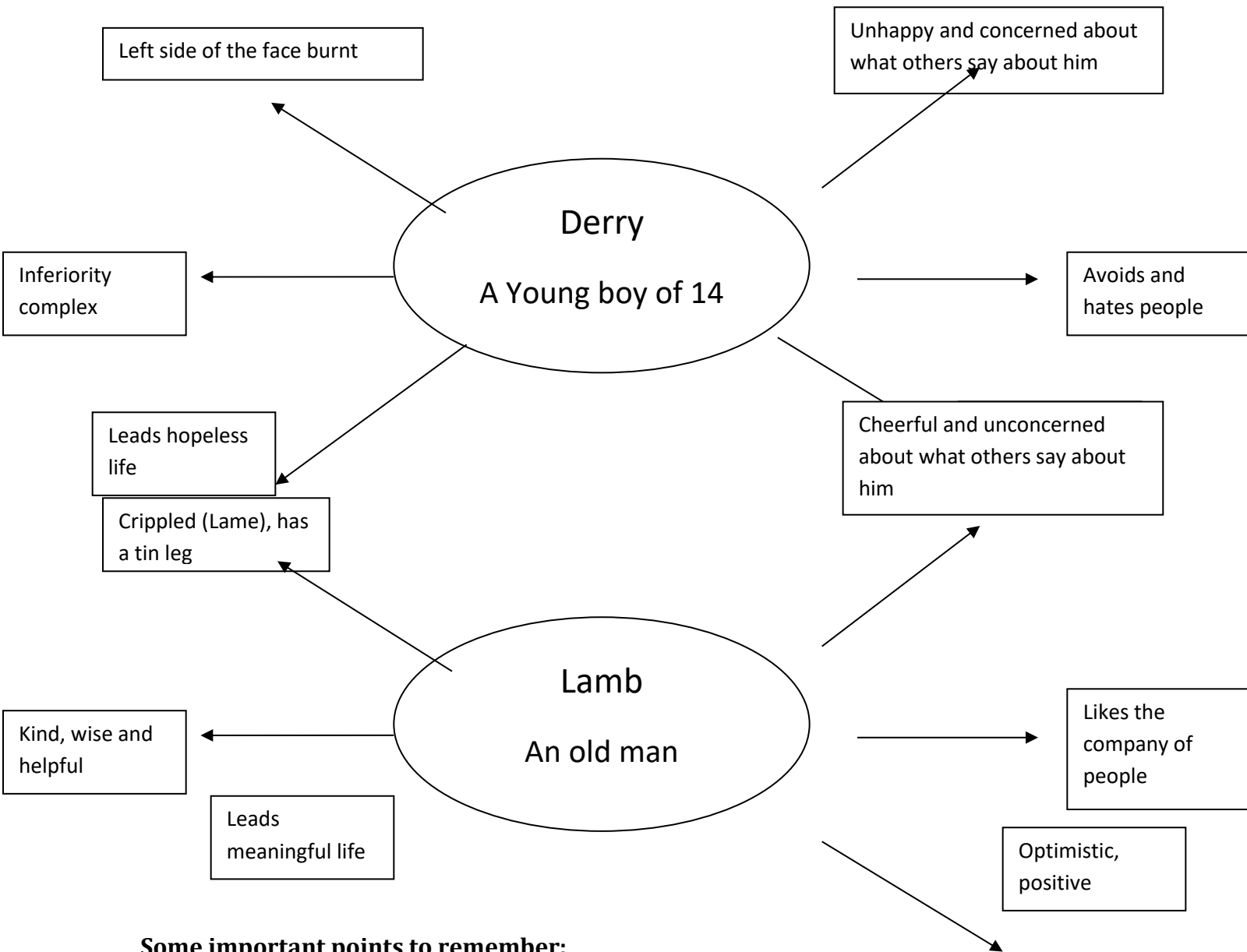
Derry climbs the wall of Lamb's Garden and enters it. He thinks that the garden is uninhabited. He is surprised to find Lamb there. The behavior of Lamb surprises him because he does not show interest in his half burnt face. He draws Lamb's attention towards his face. He tells him that his face is ugly and horrible. Nobody likes him. The people show signs of fear when they look at his face and avoid his presence. They call him a poor boy because one side of his face is burnt. Even his mother kisses him on the right side of his face.

Lamb draws Derry's attention towards his garden. He tells him that he has a tin leg. He lost his leg in the war. The children call him 'Lamey-Lamb'. He tells him peculiar things. He tells him that he lives in the house alone without curtains. He does not want to shut out the world. The buzzing of bees is singing for him. He loves reading, picking crab apples and making toffees for children.

He tells Derry that the people have other things to do and see rather than looking at him. The bitterness and hatred he has inside him could be more damaging than the acid that burnt his face or the bomb that blew up his leg. He tells him that he should look at all those people who are in pain but never complain or cry. He should think about those who are worse than him.

The positive attitude of lamb, his kindness and his ability to do things himself without any help impresses him. He promises him to come back. Although his mother stops him yet he goes to meet lamb. Lamb falls down from the ladder. Derry finds Lamb lying on the grass. In this way we find that Lamb teaches Derry the art of discovering beauty and leading happy life.

Learn about Derry and Lamb.



Some important points to remember:

- The play depicts beautifully yet grimly the sad world of the physically impaired.
- It is not the actual pain or inconvenience caused by a physical impairment that troubles a disabled man but the attitude of the people around him.
- Two physically impaired people, Mr. Lamb with a tin leg and Derry with a burnt face, strike a bond of friendship.
- Derry is described as a young boy- shy, withdrawn and defiant.
- People tell him inspiring stories to console him; no one will ever kiss him except his mother and that too on the other side of his face.

- Overhears a woman telling another woman that only a mother can love such a face.
- Mr. Lamb revives the almost dead feelings of Derry towards life.
- He motivates him to think positively about life, changes his mind set about people and things.
- Everything appears to be the same but is different- eg. of bees and weeds
- The gate of the garden is always open.
- Derry is inspired and promises to come back.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

Q1. Who is Derry? What self-opinion does he hold?

Suggested Answer / Value Points-

Derek, also called Derry was a young boy of 14. He was a quiet, shy and defiant boy. One side of his face was totally burnt by acid. He was a victim of inferiority complex.

Q2. How does Lamb try to remove the baseless fears of Derry?

Suggested Answer / Value Points-

Mr. Lamb influences Derry by his optimistic philosophy. He advised him not to give attention to other's comments, try to be internally pure and strong and eliminate the negativity in life.

Q3. What did Derry's mothers think of Mr. Lamb?

OR

Why did Derry's mother stop him from going to Mr. Lamb?

Suggested Answer / Value Points-

Derry's mother does not hold a good opinion about Mr. Lamb. She has heard many things about the old man, therefore stops Derry to visit Mr. Lamb.

Q5. Why does Derry go back to Mr. Lamb in the end?

Suggested Answer / Value Points-

Actually Mr. Lamb has taught Derry the most important lesson of life. He advises him not to care about the comments made by others. He now no longer cares about his burned face or looks. He is more concerned about what he thinks and feels ;what he wants to hear and see. He knows if does not go back, he will never go back. Therefore he returns.

Q6. Comment on the moral value of the play.

Suggested Answer / Value Points-

The moral of the play is very loud and clear. The physically disabled should focus on the brighter side of life and not brood over their shortcomings. The society should accept them as they are and expand their social interactions .In this way they can fight out the loneliness, depression and disappointment

Q7. Mr. Lamb says to Derry; 'it's all relative, beauty and the beast', what essentially does he mean by that?

Suggested Answer / Value Points-

Mr. Lamb tells Derry that it all depends upon people's individual perceptions. A thing is a beauty for one while that beauty may be a beast for others.

Q8. What was Lamb's advice to Derry about 'hating people'?

Suggested Answer / Value Points-

When Derry said that he hated some people, Mr.Lamb told him that hating people did more harm than a bottle of acid. Whereas acid had only burnt his face, hatred could burn him from within.

Q9. **"We're not the same", says Derry. How does Mr Lamb try to convince him that there is no essential difference between them?**

Ans. Derry and Mr Lamb are both of the same species. They represent various stages of growth. Derry is young, Mr Lamb is old. Both suffer from the same physical impairment. Derry has a burnt face. The old man has got a tin leg. But this physical disability is not important. What is important is that both are alive. Derry is standing there whereas Mr Lamb is sitting.

Q10. **How does Derry interpret the fairy story 'Beauty and the Beast'? What does he feel about himself?**

Ans. Derry says that he has been told that story before. It teaches us that outward appearance does not matter. It is what one is inside that is important. Handsome is that handsome does. Beauty loved the monstrous beast for himself. When she kissed him, he changed into a handsome prince. No one except Derry's mother kisses him. She too kisses him on the other side of the face. He has developed a negative attitude and says he does not care 'if nobody ever kissed' him.

Extra questions for practice

1. What is the attitude of Mr. Lamb to the small boy who comes to the garden?
2. "I'm not afraid. People are afraid of me," says Derry. What do people think on seeing his face? How do they react then?
3. Why does Lamb's argument fail to console Derry?
4. What makes Derry think that the old man is always alone and miserable? What does he tell the old man?
5. What argument does Derry give to convince his mother why he wants to go the old man's garden?
6. Comment on the ending of the play.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1.What is it that draws Derek towards Mr. Lamb inspite of himself?

Ans: When Derek meets Mr. Lamb for the first time – wants to run away – feels embarrassed. However the old man startles him with his strange talk – Derek is surprised – Mr.Lamb does not mind his stealthy entry – further surprised when Mr. Lamb says he's not as ugly as he believes himself to be – Mr. Lamb talks about his interest in everything created by God including weeds – encourages Derek by saying "you've got two arms, two legs...you'll get on the way you want, like the rest". Mr.Lamb's talk about everything and everybody being essentially the same, his notion of beauty

being relative, his concept of the world and friendship mesmerize and baffle Derek – fascinated by the old man. Derek sheds his complex of being ugly – rediscovers the joy of life. It is not only Mr.Lamb’s strange ideas that attract Derek but also his loneliness and longing for company – he returns to him at the end- the two have a great affinity – both have suffered loneliness – both long for company.

2.What is the significance of Derek’s words, “I thought it was empty...an empty house” in the play?

Ans: Derek climbs over the boundary wall and enters Mr. Lamb’s garden – Lamb not surprised at this as he’s used to seeing children coming in to steal and eat apples – but Derek has come into the garden out of curiosity – when Lamb sees him, Derek is embarrassed and tries to give an explanation.

Derek’s words are significant – points out to his terrible sense of frustration, loneliness and isolation on account of his severely burnt face – these words also prompt Lamb to speak about his loneliness – these words go a long way in Lamb’s understanding of Derek’s character and his subsequent efforts in helping Derek come out of his inferiority complex, poor self-regard and self-rejection – these words are a bitter reminder of the bitterness that has crept into Derek’s mind due to other people’s dislike and hatred for his ugly face – a desperate cry of a fourteen-year-old boy for love and acceptance.

3. In which section of the play does Mr Lamb display signs of loneliness and disappointment? What are the ways in which Mr Lamb tries to overcome these feelings?

Ans. It is in the middle section of the first scene of the play that Mr Lamb displays signs of loneliness and disappointment. He says that when it is a bit cooler, he will get the ladder and a stick, and pull down those crab apples. He makes jelly. Derry could help him. Then he says he is interested in anybody or anything that God made. It may be a person, flower, fruit, grass, weeds or rubbish. There are plenty of things to look at. Some of them are his crab apples or the weeds or a spider climbing up a silken ladder or his tall sun-flowers. He also likes to talk and have a company. He has a hive of bees. He hears them singing. He sits in the sun and reads books. He likes the light and the darkness. He hears the wind coming through open windows. There aren’t any curtains at the windows as they either shut things out or shut things in. These are the ways in which Mr Lamb tries to overcome his loneliness.

4. Will Derry get back to his old seclusion or will Mr Lamb’s brief association effect a change in the kind of life he will lead in the future?

Ans. (Two different answers are possible. One is being given below)

Derry will not get back to his old seclusion. He has been associated with Mr Lamb for a short time only, but even this brief association will effect a change in the kind of life he will lead in future. Instead of being conscious of what people comment about the ugliness of his face, he will use his head and heart to achieve what he decides to do in life. It is also possible that with his firm determination and zeal to achieve his aim, he might do better than the rest, even those who do not suffer from any physical impairment.

By his persuasive manner and skilful use of anecdotes, Mr Lamb convinces Derry that a life of seclusion and withdrawal from the world is dull as well as risky. The world has many beautiful objects to see and admire, sounds to hear and ideas to think. One should have an open mind and positive attitude. Hatred is worse than acid.

5. VBQ – The actual pain or inconvenience caused by a physical impairment is often much less than the sense of alienation felt by the person with disabilities.

What is the kind of behavior that the person expects from others?

Ans: Both Derek and Lamb suffer from physical impairment – Lamb has an artificial tin leg – Derek has a severely burnt face – both must have suffered terribly.

We see that Derek not only suffers for his burnt face but also from an acutely low self-regard, self-rejection and his notion of how much people hate him for being ugly – his loneliness and suffering are aggravated by his feeling that nobody loves/wants him – suffers pangs of alienation within his family (he believes his mother kisses him not because she loves him, but because she has to). People's indifferent attitude, their hatred and dislike for handicaps, and their utter lack of concern and compassion- hurt people more than the actual pain of impairment. Victims of impairment do not want empty words of sympathy and pity, for they feel more hurt when people continue to remind them of their being handicapped. We should accept them as they are-help them to lead better lives by creating the appropriate opportunities and environment.

6. What is the theme of the play 'On The Face Of It'? How has it been worked out?

Ans. The theme of the play is the consequences of physical impairment on the affected person's body, mind and soul. The actual pain and inconvenience caused by the disabilities is often much less than the sense of alienation felt by the disabled person. People think that a person who has lost an organ or suffered some deformity such as a disfigured face should either be confined to the hospital or allowed to move in the company of people having the same disability. The playwright does not approve of this idea as it will create a strange sort of world. The attitude of persons towards the victims of accidents or disasters needs complete change. They must be considerate and thoughtful. They must appreciate the efforts of the physically challenged persons to overcome their disability and compete with others. The theme has been worked out through the interaction of two characters—old Mr Lamb and a young boy, Derry. Through his peculiar way of looking at things and asking questions, Mr Lamb persuades Derry to have a positive approach to life. Only positive attitude towards life will give one true happiness.

7. Comment on the ending of the play 'On The Face Of It'. How far do you find it effective ?

Ans. The ending of the play is quite suggestive. Mr Lamb, who has been picking apples, falls down along with the ladder. As Derry enters the garden, he finds total silence pervading there. He is surprised and shocked to see Mr Lamb on the ground. He hopes it is all right. He kneels near Mr Lamb and announces that he has come back and he is there. He implores the old man to get up and talk. As the old man does not respond to Derry's repeated requests, he begins to weep.

The ending is quite dramatic and stageworthy. The old man with the ladder under him

is a Christ-like figure. It is a pathetic ending, no doubt, but it does not spread gloom. Rather, it acts like a beacon light. The old generation has handed over the charge to the younger one. It is like a soldier making an exit with the satisfaction of mission accomplished. The old man has handed over his philosophy of life to Derry and inspired him to find out what he wants to be. Thus, though the old man expires physically, his ideas inspire Derry to pursue higher goals and achieve them. In this sense, the ending is quite effective and meaningful.

8. What do you understand by 'On The Face Of It'? Do you think the title 'On the Face of It' is appropriate? Give reasons in support of your answer.

Ans. 'On The Face Of It' is used to say that something seems to be good, true, etc. but that this opinion may need to be changed when you know more about it.

Apparently, the play seems to be an interaction between two persons suffering from physical impairment. Being a drama of ideas, it has minimum physical action. The old man's efforts to strike up a friendship with a young boy of fourteen, who is very withdrawn and defiant, seems to be the main issue. The old man's effort is worth appreciation.

However, as we go on reading further, more is in store for us. We learn the mental anguish, emotional starvation and physical distress of the physically challenged who are unable to lead normal life among normal persons. The play is not didactic but it inspires people like Derry, who have some physical blemish, to ignore it as well as comments of people about it. They should set goals for themselves and strive to outshine even the other normal persons. Thus, the title is quite appropriate and highly suggestive.

9. Draw a character sketch of old Mr Lamb.

Ans. Mr Lamb is the protagonist in the play. He dominates the play from beginning to end. He impresses us as a sensitive, watchful, kind, considerate and sympathetic person. He is quite gentle, accommodating and protective. He is more concerned about the boy's well-being than the apples.

He is a victim of alienation due to his physical impairment. Though he keeps his gates open and says he has many friends, actually he lives alone and is quite miserable. He loves company and wants to talk. He shares his thoughts even with the young boy.

Mr Lamb is like a modern communicator and a psychologist who believes in drawing out the best of an individual. His tactful handling and peculiar questions make Derry shed some of his firmly fixed notions and respond to the things of the world around him. Thus he is a source of inspiration to the depressed and gloomy.

Mr Lamb is pragmatic. His way of life is an object lesson for all who suffer some physical handicap or the other. One can always undertake some meaningful activities which give life some purpose and aim and save it from boredom. Even in his fall with the ladder, he exhibits Christ-like grace.

10. How did Mr.Lamb's meeting with Derry become a turning point in Derry's life? (Delhi,2008)

11. Though both Mr.Lamb and Derry suffer from a physical disability , their attitude to life is very different. Justify the relevance of this statement with reference to the story, 'On The Face of It'. (Foreign 2009)

12. Do you think Derry's chance meeting with Mr.Lamb would prove meaningful to him? Answer giving valid reasons. (Foreign 2009)

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