



Summary:

The language of any country is the pride of that country. It not only defines the culture but also tells us about the people, literature and history of the country. Language for some people is just the medium of communication but for others it is the question of life and death.

The Franco-Prussian War or Franco-German War, often referred to in France as the 1870 War (19 July 1870 – 10 May 1871) was a conflict between the Second French Empire and the Kingdom of Prussia. Prussia was aided by the North German Confederation, of which it was a member, and the South German states of Baden, Württemberg and Bavaria. The complete Prussian and German victory brought about the final unification of Germany under King Wilhelm I of Prussia. It also marked the downfall of Napoleon III and the end of the Second French Empire, which was replaced by the French Third Republic. As part of the settlement, the territory of Alsace-Lorraine was taken by Prussia to become a part of Germany, which would retain until the end of World War I.

'The Last Lesson' very prominently raises the question of linguistic and cultural hegemony of the colonial and imperial powers and their lust for controlling the world and influencing their cultures and identities.

The Last Lesson raises the burning question very innocently through the words of little Franz that "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?" This raises the question of immorality of imposing imperial languages and cultures on the colonies. The child questions that when even the birds and animals can't be forced to abandon their language and speak others, then what forces the man to think that it would be prudent to force other human beings to accept any language other than theirs.

The language of a country is not only a medium of communication for the people but also the link for identity, once the native language is snatched away from the people. It's not only the loss of convenient communicating medium but also the loss of identity for people for what they have been and what they might become.

When a small child like Franz can think of the irrationality behind snatching away the right of language and identity from people then why can't the war lords and colonizers understand the fact?

Summary – Brief Notes

Franz Notices Changes

- Crowd gathered

- School quiet
 - No sound of desks, lessons, teacher's ruler.
- M. Hamel**
 - didn't scold/spoke kindly
 - wearing green coat, frilled shirt, black silk cap.
 - announced last lesson in French, German to be taught
- Villagers, Hauser, postmaster, others – On back benches.

Franz's reaction to last lesson in French

- Shocked, realized deficiency in language, wished-not wasted time.
- felt sorry, repented for wasting time.
- appreciated M.Hamel, accepted him with his faults.
- wanted to impress M.Hamel with knowledge of French.
- Understands presence of villagers
 - to thank master
 - to show solidarity for country
 - repenting for not attending school

M. Hamel made the class realize

- reluctance to learn, postponing learning
- parents sending them to work
- himself sent to water plants
- all to blame for situation
- too late to make amends
- no time to make up for lost time
- Germans will laugh at inability to speak French.

Main Characters

1. M. Hamel

- Sincere French teacher
 - knows subject well
- Passionate about French
 - considers French-clearer, most beautiful, logical
 - feels-key to person's sense of freedom
 - advises to hold on to French
- Proud of being French
 - upset by occupation of Alsace by Germans
 - attached to town, school, people.
- Hard Task Master
 - particular about discipline and learning
 - students scared
 - last day - exercises on all aspects of language
- Sensitive, Honest
 - blames himself for selfishness
 - emotional by sound of Prussian soldiers

2. Franz

- Sensitive, Honest
 - Blames himself for ignoring lessons
 - Wonders if pigeons will coo in German
 - Understands feelings of Hauser
- Loves outdoors
 - Sunshine, birds, butterflies, collecting bird's eggs.
- As a student
 - repents, good observer, notices changes.
- Empathizes with M. Hamel
 - Understands emotions, accepts him with faults

Solved Answers: (Short answer questions)

1.What change was noticed by Franz in his French teacher while teaching his last lesson?

Ans. M.Hamel – a perfect and ideal teacher. His tone becomes gentle and polite. As a true patriot-calls upon the people to shake off their habit of procrastinating to safeguard their language- the most beautiful language in the world.

2. How did Franz's feelings about M.Hamel and school change?

Ans. Order from Berlin-that only German would be taught in schools-aroused a sense of patriotism in Franz quite suddenly he developed a strange fascination for his school and the French language- his books which were earlier a burden to him were 'old friends now'- also developed a certain respect for M.Hamel- the fact that he would not teach them anymore, made Franz forget how cranky he was.

3. What is the significance of the last lesson?

Ans. The last lesson was to be delivered by the French teacher, M.Hamel, to his students. From the next day, learning the German language would be imposed on the people speaking French. The teacher stressed upon the importance of the French language which he calls the most beautiful language in the world. He tells the class to guard their language among themselves and never forget it.

4. Why was Franz tempted to play truant from school?

Ans. The French Teacher M Hamel was going to ask questions on participles which Franz had not prepared. To avoid being scolded he was tempted to play truant from school and spend the day out doors in a pleasurable manner.

5. What was unusual about the school that Franz noticed when he entered the school?

Ans. As Franz entered in school he noticed the unusual silence as if it was a Sunday morning. No noise of lesson chanting, no noise of opening and closing of desk drawers. All students were already in class. Teacher was wearing the special fancy dress which he would usually wear only on special occasions like prize ceremonies etc. The back

benches were occupied by the villagers

6. Why was it the last lesson? How did Franz react to it?

Ans. As the order from Berlin had come to teach German in all schools of Alsace and Lorraine there would be no French lesson from the next day M Hamel announced in the class. The announcement was like a thunderclap to Franz. He felt sorry for not learning French. The French books, which earlier were a nuisance, became attractive. He felt he could not give up his French books.

7. What reasons did M Hamel give for their lack of interest in learning French?

Ans. The lack of interest in learning French was due to the parents who wanted their children to work in the farm or mill to earn; due to the students who were reluctant to learn and often put off the lesson for the next day and due to himself as he asked them to water the flowers and gave them off when he had to go for fishing.

8. Why does M Hamel not want the people to forget French?

Ans. M Hamel did not want them to forget French as it is the most beautiful and logical language and as long as they held fast to their language it would be as if they had the key to the prison.

9. Describe how M Hamel conducted the last lesson.

Ans. In his last French class though M Hamel was emotional he fully involved himself in the teaching learning process. He heard every lesson to the last, sitting motionless in the chair. When the church bell struck twelve he stood up pale and wrote 'Vive La French' and with a gesture he communicated that the school was dismissed.

10. Describe the impact of the notice on Franz, M. Hamel and the senior villagers?

Ans. The notice affected everybody deeply. Franz thought why he had wasted his time on leisure activities instead of learning his own language. The books which would seem to him as a burden now seemed to be old friends to him. H. Hamel was feeling guilty for sending his students for his personal tasks. Villagers were feeling guilty for not having sent their children to school.

11. **CBSE 2018 : Why were some elderly persons occupying the back benches that day?**

Ans: The order had come from Berlin to stop teaching French in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine and for German to be taught instead. In the last French lesson, the elderly were seen occupying the last benches as a mark of respect for M.Hamel who had taught there for forty years. They sat there as they wished to have gone

to school more regularly. They also wanted to pay tribute to their country and mother tongue.

****** CBSE 2019 :** *How and why was M.Hamel dressed differently that day?*

Solved answer: (Long answer question)

12. Write a brief character sketch of M. Hamel?

Ans. M. Hamel was taken as a strict teacher. Students were afraid of his iron ruler. He was a very sincere and dedicated teacher who served for forty long years in his service as a teacher to the village in Alsace. When he got the notice to vacate his place to make space for the new German teacher, he was totally broken. He remained sad and nostalgic during his final class as he loved his country very much. This changed his behavior; he behaved rather very politely and patiently. When Franz was not able to say his lesson correctly, instead of scolding him he just made him understand the relevance of learning the mother tongue. He preached to everyone present in the class that important things should never be postponed. He regretted the fact that learning of French was never given any importance

13. Franz thinks, “Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?”. Comment.

Ans. The Last Lesson is set in the days of the Franco-Prussian War. It depicts how, after defeating France in the War, the Prussians wanted to take over not only the French territory but also rule over the minds of the people of France. So an order received from Berlin declared that the French language was no longer to be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine and was to be replaced by the German language. This news came as a shock to the French people. Franz, too, felt extremely sad at being deprived of learning his own language. He wondered at such tyranny where man tried to enslave the minds of other men after capturing their territories. During his last French lesson, when Franz hears the pigeons cooing, he wonders if they too would be forced by the Prussians to sing in German. He fails to see any reason for man’s domination over man where, if given a choice, man would not hesitate to master his control even over the forces of nature and its beings.

14. What do you think is the theme of the story ‘The Last Lesson’? What is the reason behind its universal appeal?

Ans. The lesson highlights the human tendency to postpone the learning of things because one feels there is plenty of time to do so. One does not realize that each day brings with it changing circumstances that change life for better or for worse. The writer also asks the reader to value time, freedom and peace. One never knows what a new dawn would bring with it that might end our hopes and aspirations. Through the narrator, the author urges the reader to respect his country, its people, its culture and specially its language for ‘it has the key to their freedom.

The people of Alsace always thought they had plenty of time to learn their lessons; therefore, they did not give much importance to school. They preferred their children to work on the farms and mills instead of having them learn the lessons. Even Franz always looked for opportunities to skip school and collect bird's eggs.

However, the unexpected happens and an order is received from Berlin regarding compulsory teaching of German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. It is then that they realize that they would be deprived of what they had been evading all this while.

The story is aptly titled as it evokes the consciousness in the reader not to put off things and do what one can do that day.

15. The story 'The Last Lesson' is all about 'linguistic chauvinism'. Comment.

Ans. Man was born free but he has bound himself everywhere in chains – the chains of communism, regionalism, nationalities and even linguistic confinements. War and battles for acquiring power became a part of his nature. His desire to rule and become the lord of the world, made him selfish and self-centred.

The story 'The Last Lesson' is all about linguistic chauvinism. Acquisition of power over the Alsacians made the Prussians so domineering that they imposed even their language on them. Their pride in their language was so fixed that there was no scope of respecting and accepting the language of others. Their rulers wanted to dominate even their minds and hearts and wanted them to even think in their language, thereby causing the loss of their identity. The story thus highlights linguistic chauvinism which is becoming a major cause of wars and political disturbance in the world.

16. 'When a people are enslaved , as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to the prison'. Explain.

Ans. Political enslavement is a curse for any nation as it deprives it of its identity. The natives of the country do not enjoy any kind of freedom, physical or mental. The ruling government dictates its own terms and compels them to abide by these rules. The enslaved natives become victims of a confined life with no hope of ever being free in their motherland. At such times of enslavement, it is their language which keeps their identity alive. It unites them against the foreigners who have invaded their motherland.

Their language is the key to their prison as it binds them together. It constantly reminds them of their enslavement and thus urges them to fight for the liberation of their motherland. Here M.Hamel reminds his countrymen to safeguard their language after they've received orders from Berlin. He knew that his countrymen could liberate themselves only if they recognized and maintained their identity through their mother tongue. Thus even though it was their last lesson, M.Hamel wanted them to be proud of the beautiful French language.

Value Based Questions:

17. 'Then he turned to the blackboard , took a piece of chalk and, bearing on with all his might, wrote as large as he could-Vive La France!' Abraham Lincoln, a former President of America said, "I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man so that his place will be proud of him." After reading the lesson and the above quote you begin to reflect on the lost spirit of patriotism amongst

the youth in India due to which there's no respect for one's countrymen and no determination amongst the youth to lead the country to a better future.

Write an article in about 100 words for a national magazine on the need for revival of patriotic spirit amongst the youth in India.

Value Points:

- Country's youth value starved-facing a total crisis
- Violence, separations and inter group conflicts, political apathy-order of the day
- Secured freedom but not utilized in its true perspective
- Time for young people to wake up and create their own identity
- Need for good leadership and good governance
- Need to inculcate the spirit of nationalism along with humanity in children from the beginning

18. The people of Alsace did not understand the importance of learning their language – French. Emphasize upon the importance and need of learning one's native language. Discuss what values are revealed when one sets upon learning one's native language.

Value Points:

- Impact of Western culture-importance of one's native language-taken a back seat
- One's native language-repository of culture, identity and way of living
- Cause of pride
- Knowing one's native language gives a sense of belonging
- Native language also reminiscent of one's childhood, friends and relatives
- Speaking the native language-only way to connect to one's people and soul

19. The old people of Alsace do not realize the importance of education but when they come to know that it was the last day of learning French, they promptly report to school, with their elementary books. So it is an undeniable truth that it is never too late to be educated. Keeping this in mind, write an article on 'The need for Adult Literacy in the changing scenario of today's world'.

Value Points:

- There's no specific age to be literate
- Adults who missed the prime time –due to lack of resources, social restrictions, ignorance-can make use of this benefit to get educated
- Literacy will save them from exploitation, impart confidence and empower them
- The government and NGOs striving to increase the literacy level-several schemes
- Training in basic education is the right of every citizen
- 'Each One Teach One'- should spread to every corner and each segment of the society