

## The Tale of Melon City

### **Question 1:**

Narrate 'The Tale of Melon City' in your own words.

### **Answer:**

'The Tale of Melon City' runs like a folk tale. The city is called Melon City because its ruler is a melon. There is a curious tale around it. Once a fair and gentle king ruled over a state. He got an arch built across the thoroughfare. As he passed under the low arch it struck his head and he lost his crown. He thought it a disgrace and ordered the chief of builders to be hanged. The chief lay the blame on the workmen. The workmen were surprised. They said that the bricks were made of the wrong size. So the masons were thought guilty. The masons shifted the blame on the architect. The architect put the blame at the king's door as he had amended his original plan.

The king sought a wise man's counsel. He held the arch guilty and ordered it to be hanged. A councillor objected to it as it had touched the king's head. The people became restless. They wanted to see someone hanging. Only the king's head could fit the noose. So he was hanged. It was now announced that the next man who passed the City Gate would choose the king. An idiot came. He suggested 'A melon'. So the melon was crowned the king. He was taken to the throne. He was called the melon king.

### **Question 2:**

What impression would you form of a state where the king was just and placid\*?

### **Answer:**

The State where the king was just and placid' seems to be a backward region full of ignorant fools and ruled by a whimsical king. The king considers himself to be the custodian of people and gets an arch erected for their spiritual upliftment. The king's word is a command and unwritten law. The whole process of changing judgement on the appeals of the victims appears as a mock-trial. The Ministers and Councillors seem to be selfish. They advise the king to serve their own ends, though they appear to flatter the king and seem dedicated to the state. The common people are uneducated and ignorant fools. They need mental as well as spiritual upliftment. They are fun loving. In their quest for fun, they can cross all limits. If deprived of fun, the unruly mob can rebel against the crown. They do not bother whether the king is a man or a melon. They want their personal freedom, free business and peaceful lives.

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**Question 3:**

How can peace and liberty be maintained in a state?

**Answer:**

Various people advocate various means of maintaining peace and liberty in a state.

Some are in favour of dictatorship while others favour democracy. I think the best course lies in good governance. Whatever is well-administered is most fruitful for the citizens as well as the rulers. It ensures peace and liberty to the common man. A strong state, in itself, is safe against any external threat. Dedicated rulers, enlightened citizens and proper law enforcing agencies can establish peace and harmony in the state. Narrow considerations based on region, religion, caste etc. should be discouraged because these are potent threats to internal security as they fuel dissensions among the people. Free expression of opinions must be allowed but respect for law and order be observed. People should be conscious of their privileges and rights as well as duties and responsibilities. This is the only way to maintain peace and liberty.

**Question 4:**

Suggest a few instances in the poem which highlight humour and irony?

**Answer:**

'The Tale of Melon City' is full of instances of humour and irony. The just and placid the king got an arch built to 'edify' spectators. The king's riding under a low arch and losing his crown also creates humour. The

way the accused appeal to the king and shift the blame on others is quite funny. The unstable behaviour of the king also creates humour. The self-defence of the architect is a masterpiece. He holds the king himself responsible for the disgrace as he had 'made certain amendments' to his original plan. The king's anger and inability to act calmly create humour.

The criteria for selection of the wisest man is quite ironic. It is assumed that wisdom comes with age. Being blind he does not know that an arch cannot be hanged. Others have eyes, yet they follow his advice and take the arch to the gallows. How ironic it is! The king wants to keep the crowd in good humour and orders that someone be hanged. Only the king is tall enough to fit the noose. What an irony! The king is hanged by his own order. The custom of naming the next king seems equally ridiculous. The idiot who passes by the City Gate suggests "melon" to be the next king. People who think only of their own interests do not bother whether the king is a man or a melon.

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**Question 1:**

What sort of king ruled over the state? What did he proclaim?

**Answer:**

The king was fair and gentle. He seemed to be interested in the welfare of the masses. So he proclaimed that an arch should be constructed which should extend across the major thoroughfare. He hoped that it would improve people's mind on looking at it.

**Question 2:**

Why did the king ride down the thoroughfare and what was the result?

**Answer:**

The king rode down the thoroughfare to edify spectators there. Since the arch was built too low, he lost his crown under it. A frown appeared on his mild face and he called it a disgrace.

**Question 3:**

Who was held responsible for the disgrace? How did he /they react to it? What do you learn about the king?

**Answer:**

The chief of builders was held responsible for the disgrace and ordered to be hanged. The chief called it the workmen's fault. The king ordered to have all the workmen hanged. The workmen looked surprised but they blamed the wrong size of bricks for it. This shows the king's fickle mindedness.

**Question 4:**

What argument did the architect advance in self-defence? How did the king take it?

**Answer:**

The architect reminded the king that he had made certain amendments to the original plans of the architect. He suggested that it was the fault of the king himself. On hearing it, the king became so angry that he nearly lost his ability to act sensibly or calmly.

**Question 5:**

Why did the king need some counsel and from whom? Do you think the man was really the wisest one? Give a reason for your answer.

**Answer:**

The king got confused by the architect's clever self-defense. So, he needed the advice of the wisest man in the country. The man selected was so old that he could neither walk nor see. He was not really the wisest one as wisdom does not necessarily come with age. His advice proves his worthlessness.

**Question 6:**

Comment upon the criteria of selection of the wisest man and the quality of counsel he offered.

**Answer:**

The criteria was that wisdom comes with grey hair. The old man they selected could not walk or see. He spoke in a trembling voice. The advice he offered was absurd. A lifeless object cannot be deprived of life by hanging it.

**Question 7:**

What does the comment of the councillor about the arch reveal about himself and the king?

**Answer:**

It shows the councillor's sycophancy and the King's capriciousness. The councillor, an expert in the art of flattery, checked the king from an absurd action, through an argument that appeared logical. The thoughtless king mused over it.

**Question 8:**

Why did the king succumb to public demand?

**Answer:**

The king noticed that the crowd of spectators had become restless and people were muttering aloud. He judged their mood. He trembled to think of the consequences if they were deprived of the fun of watching someone being hanged. So, in order to save his skin, he ordered that someone be hanged immediately.

**Question 9:**

What was the result of the King's thoughtless order?

**Answer:**

The king ordered that someone be hanged immediately. So the noose was set up somewhat high. Each man was measured one by one. Only one man was found tall enough to fit the noose. He was the king. He was hanged by the royal order. Thus the king paid with his life for his thoughtless order.

**Question 10:**

Why did the Ministers feel relieved? Do you think their elation was justified?

**Answer:**

The Ministers felt relieved that the public's eagerness to watch a hanging had been satisfied. They expressed their pleasure by saying that they found someone for hanging. They believed that if they had failed to do so, the unruly town might have turned against the king. Their elation is misplaced. The king had to lose his life to keep the public in good humour.

**Question 11:**

What opinion do you form of the King's Ministers on the basis of their actions after the King's death?

**Answer:**

The Ministers believed in tradition and ceremonies. They shouted in one breath, 'Long live the king! The king is dead'. They were practical-minded men. They knew that the throne could not be left unoccupied. The crown being a symbol of power, someone must be crowned as king.

**Question 12:**

What 'custom' of the citizens is referred to in the tale? How did the Ministers decide to observe it?

**Answer:**

It is their custom to choose the new ruler of their state. Whoever passed the City Gate first of all the next day, would choose the ruler of the state. This method of random choice excluded dynastic rule as well as conspiracies. The Ministers decided to observe it with proper formality.

**Question 13:**

How was the new ruler of the state selected?

**Answer:**

The Ministers sent out messengers to declare that the next man to pass the City Gate would choose the ruler of their state. An idiot happened to pass the gate. When asked to decide who was to be the king, he replied, "A melon." This was his standard answer to all questions. The Ministers declared that a melon would be their new ruler.



**Question 14:**

What does the selection process of the new ruler of the state reveal about the ministers and the people?

**OR**

How did the people and ministers react to the selection of 'a melon' as the new ruler?

**Answer:**

The selection process seems quite ridiculous. It also shows how ignorant masses stick to traditions and clever ministers go on fooling them. They are more worried about their own peace, freedom and business affairs than the ruler. This shows how selfish, self-centred and ego-centric they are.

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**Question 1:**

How did the accused try to shift the blame on others? How far did they succeed?

**Answer:**

The chief of builders was the first one to be held guilty. He shifted the blame on the workmen. The workmen were surprised but did not lose their reasoning power. They told the king he had forgotten the fact that the bricks were made of the wrong size. Swayed by their rational argument, the masons were summoned. They trembled with fear, but shifted the blame on the architect who was responsible for planning and erecting the arch. The king ordered the architect to be hanged. The clever architect reminded the king that he had forgotten one small thing. He had made certain amendments to plans when the former had shown them to the latter. This clearly meant that he held the king responsible for the mishap. The king became very angry and lost his capacity of clear judgement. He called it a tricky thing and sought the advice of the wisest man in the country. Thus each accused succeeded in shifting the blame on others.

**Question 2:**

What impression do you gather about the king from 'The Tale of Melon City'?

**Answer:**

The just and placid king appears quite ruthless as he becomes 'placider' and decides to have all the workmen hanged instead of the chief of builders. His wobbling mind and capricious nature is indicated by the frequent changes in his decision. He is easily swayed by arguments and seems fickle-minded. He seems to be eager about public welfare and gets an arch constructed across the thoroughfare to edify them. The whimsical king is easily outwitted by the clever architect. The king loses his head in a fit of anger. In order to save his skin, he seeks the advice of the wisest man in the country. The king wants to keep the public in good humour. He is quite observant and judges the mood of the masses correctly. His lack of foresight proves to be his doom. The height of the noose fits only his neck. He foolishly becomes a victim of his own order. He wants to prevent a public revolt but pays for the public amusement with his blood. Thus he is a short-sighted crank with muddled reasoning power.

**Question 3:**

What do you think makes 'The Tale of Melon City' interesting and edifying?

**Answer:**

As the title indicates the poem tells a story about Melon City—a city named after its ruler. It is quite interesting and edifying to learn how the country got a melon as its ruler. In short, it was on account of customary choice. The people relate the story of a just and placid king who was hanged by his own Royal Decree.

What the king did for the people and how he held the trails of the accused are both quite amusing. The clever arguments of the accused to save their lives are equally interesting. The king feels the pulse of the people who want to see a hanging. He knows how mischievous an angry mob can be and hence orders that someone must be hanged immediately. The irony of the situation is that only the king is tall enough to fit the noose.

The practical-minded ministers resort to the age-old custom to choose the next ruler. The idiot's choice is approved in the name of custom. The people are indifferent to the fact that their ruler is a melon not a man. The behaviour of pragmatic ministers and

equally selfish, foolish and mean people seems quite funny and interesting. It is instructive too. A wise man should avoid the company of fools.

**Question 4:**

“The poem mocks the process of fair trial and proper judgement.” How far do you agree with the statement?

**Answer:**

The poem is a severe indictment of the age-old custom of delivering justice by word of mouth of the kings. There was a time when the King’s word was considered divine and whatever he uttered was law. A just and placid king was expected to protect the innocent and punish the guilty. However, the process of trial and the ever-changing judgments make a fun of the whole process of fair trials and considered awards. This is evident from the statements of the accused who try to save their lives by holding others responsible for the guilt. The King’s capriciousness and inability to see through the thin veil of their arguments make him an object of ridicule rather than a dispenser of divine justice. Hence, we agree hilly with the above statement.

**Question 5:**

Comment on the ending of the poem ‘The Tale of Melon City’. What bearing does the ending have on the title of the poem?

**OR**

Comment on the title of the poem ‘The Tale of Melon City’.

**Answer:**

The ending of ‘The Tale of Melon City’ is quite significant. It has a direct bearing on the title. The ending of the poem reveals that the incidents took place long ago. It throws a light on the old custom of the state to choose their new ruler. Confronted with the dilemma, the ministers took the easy way out. The person who passed the City Gate next was to name the king. It happened to be an idiot who gave the standard answer “a melon” to every question. So the melon was crowned the king,

carried to the throne and respectfully set down there. The people are not at all ashamed to have a melon as their king. They say that if the king rejoices in being a melon, that's all right with them. They find no fault with him as long as he leaves them to enjoy their peace, freedom and free trade. The capital city is called Melon City after the king. Thus the ending throws light on the selfish nature of the people and their belief in old customs. It also explains the title.