

Question Bank & Notes: Silk Road

GRADE XI

Subject: English

Characters:

The Author: He is a professor of Geography at Oxford University and an environmental consultant.

Tsetan: He is the owner of the car hired by the author for the journey as well as a tourist guide.

Daniel: He is an interpreter from Lhasa who travelled part of the time with the author.

Norbu: He is a Tibetan working at an academy in Beijing who wants to complete his 'kora' (pilgrimage) at Mount Kailash.

Theme: This chapter is part of a travelogue about the author's travel along the ancient trade route called 'Silk Road'. This account of the Silk Road, with its contrasts and exotic details, describes the challenges and hardships the author faced while undertaking his journey to Mount Kailash on a pilgrimage.

I. Briefly answer the following:

1. What was the purpose of the journey to Mount Kailash?

Ans: Nick Middleton was an Oxford professor as well an adventurer. He follows the most difficult terrain through the Silk Road and reaches Mount Kailash. He visits the holy place and completes the Kora- going around the place.

2. Write about the author's physical condition in Darchen

Ans: The author was not physically well when he reached Darchen. His sinuses were blocked due to the cold wind at Hor and he was not able to sleep well at night. The next day Tsetan took him to the Darchen Medical College and the doctor there gave him some medicine that gave him some relief.

3. Describe the author's meeting with Norbu.

Ans: The author was feeling rather lonely without Tsetan who had left for Lhasa. There weren't any pilgrims at Darchen as he had reached the place much early in the season. It was then that he met Norbu who was a Tibetan and also an academician. He too was there to visit Mt. Kailash and they decided to go there together.

4. Comment on Tsetan's support to the author during the journey.

Ans: Tsetan was a good and efficient driver. He drove the car very carefully. During the journey, he spoke to the author giving information about the places they were visiting. He was very caring. At Darchen when he found that the author was not well, he took him to the medical college and got medicine for him. He was a good Buddhist.

5. Comment on the following: "As a Buddhist, he told me, he knew that it didn't really matter if I passed away, but he thought it would be bad for business".

Ans: Tsetan was a good Buddhist and believed that death was not the end of life. Kailash being a holy place it would be better for him as it would take him to heaven. Then if the author would die there, it would be bad for his business as his credibility would be at stake in looking after the tourists and later, he may not get any customers.

II. Long Questions:

1. Justify the title 'Silk Road'.

Ans: The 'Silk Road' is not a single highway, but a network of overland routes linking Europe with Asia, making trade possible between those with a passion for silk, horses and exotic fauna and flora. It's a thread that links East and West, a network of veins that pumped new lifeblood into mighty empires, a fabled route trodden by innumerable adventures through the ages.

Yet, underlying this trail is one of the most extraordinary tracts of land on this planet, a vast region separating China from the Mediterranean world that rates as one of the least hospitable areas on Earth. It was difficult crossing such unforgiving territory that kept East and West apart for so long, allowing them to develop in their own distinct ways.

The author records the challenges and hardships he faced in the Silk Road regions as they are now. The reader finds it refreshing to traverse such vast tracts of the natural world that remain largely unchanged from earlier days. Thus, the title is justified.

2. Why does the narrator think that the snow was dangerous yet beautiful?

Ans: Silk Road by Nick Middleton is a thorough account of the author's visit to Mount Kailash. Tsetan on his way reviewed snow on the path by stomping on it. The snow was not deep enough but they feared the car would turn over in case they slipped and so they flung a handful of dirt across the frozen surface to cover this risk. After that, they were able to drive without any trouble. A few minutes later, they stopped at one more obstruction. This time they determined to drive about the snow. However, the risks did not weaken the attractive beauty of the place. In the valley, they saw mountains that were covered with snow and the river was wide but mostly jammed with ice, and sparkling in the sunshine.

3. Describe the initial phase of their journey

Ans: As they set out, they took a shorter route to get off the Changtang. It was a road that would take them south-west, almost directly towards Mount Kailash. It required crossing several quite high mountains passes. Tsetan was confident that if there was no snow, they would have comfortable journey but that they would not know till they got there.

From the gently sloping hills of Ravu, the short cut took them across vast open plains with nothing in them except a few antelopes grazing in the arid pastures. As they moved ahead, the plains became more stony than grassy. There, the antelopes were replaced by herds of wild ass.

4. Why was the narrator fascinated by the awesome mastiffs?

Ans: Crossing the nomads dark tents pitched in remoteness, the narrator noticed the huge black dog, a Tibetan mastiff that guarded most of the tents. These monstrous creatures would tilt their great big heads when someone moved towards them. As they drew closer, these dogs would race straight towards them, like a bullet from a gun. The dogs were pitch black and usually wore bright red collars.

They barked furiously with their gigantic jaws and were so fearless that they ran straight into the path of their vehicle. They would chase them for about a hundred metres. The narrator could now understand why Tibetan mastiffs became popular in China's imperial courts as hunting dogs.

5. 'I hadn't made much progress with my self-help programme on positive thinking.' Why does the narrator feel so?

Ans: The narrator was very disappointed with Darchen. It was dusty, with heaps of rubble and refuse. But he was even more disappointed as there was no pilgrims. As his mind went over the drawbacks of the place he concluded that he hadn't made much progress with his self-help programme on positive thinking. In that case he would have been more accepting and optimistic.

6. The narrator on his way to Mount Kailash came across a lot of topographic variation.
Comment

Ans: The narrator and his companions took a short cut to get off the Changtang. Tsetan knew a route that would take them southwest, almost directly towards Mount Kailash. It involved crossing several fairly high mountain passes. From the gently rising and falling hills of Ravu, the short cut took them across vast open plains with nothing in them except a few gazelles that were grazing in the arid pastures. Further ahead, the plains became more stony than grassy, and there a great herd of wild ass came into view. Still ahead, the hills became steeper where solitary drokbas were tending their flocks. This left them to the snow-capped mountains and then to the valley where the river was wide and by and large clogged with ice. At a height of 5,515 metres, piles of stones marked the landscape. Next was the plateau which was covered with salty desert area and salty lakes that were remnants of the Tethys Ocean. Hor was next in line. It was a wretched place with no vegetation just dust and rocks, liberally scattered with years of accumulated refuse.

III. Reference to Context – Extract 1

These beasts would cock their great big heads when they became aware of our approach and fix us in their sights. As we continued to draw closer, they would explode into action, speeding directly towards us, like a bullet from a gun and nearly as fast.

- i. What beast is the narrator talking about?
 - a. The Himalayan dogs
 - b. the big foot
 - c. the Tibetan mastiffs**
 - d. the huge yaks

- ii. ‘They would explode into action’- what does this mean?
 - a. The dogs would chase the car with great speed**
 - b. There was a loud explosion
 - c. The loud sound of the tire burst
 - d. The sound of the landslide on the journey

- iii. What kind of dogs were the Tibetan mastiffs?
 - a. huge and black
 - b. very quick
 - c. guard dogs
 - d. all of the above**

IV. MCQ’s and competency-based questions

What is the meaning of ‘kyang’?

- (a) Flower
- (b) Huge pile of dust
- (c) Wild Tibetan ass
- (d) huge pile of grass

Ans: (c)

2. Why was the protagonist facing communication problems in Darchen?

- (a) As he never wanted to talk to locals
- (b) As he was always busy in his meditation
- (c) As no one knew English
- (d) None of the above

Ans: (c)

3. Why was Hor an ugly and miserable place?

- (a) It had no modern markets
- (b) It had no vegetation

- (c) It didn't have any proper medical facilities
- (d) It had no place to live

Ans: (b)

4. What are the names of four rivers that Lake Mansarovar consists of?

5. Norbu wanted to do Kora because-

- (a) He had wanted to become a monk
- (b) He wanted peace of mind
- (c) Wanted to practice meditation
- (d) He was writing an academic paper on Kailash Kora

Answer (d)

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