

Children At Work

Comprehension Check (Page 9)

Question 1:

Velu stood on the platform but he felt “as if he was still on a moving train”. Why?

Answer:

Velu had run away from his home to Chennai by catching the Kanyakumari Express. He travelled in a train for the first time and as he got off the train and stood on the platform, he felt his legs were shaky and wobbly. Besides, he was very hungry and stressed and felt as though he was still on a moving train.

Question 2:

What made him feel miserable?

Answer:

Velu felt exhausted and miserable as he laid down his head on his knees because he had run away from his village two days ago due to the torture inflicted upon him by his drunkard father. He had not eaten anything in the past two days except for some peanuts and a piece of jaggery. He felt lost and hopeless when he arrived at the big city.

Question 3:

- (i) Velu travelled without a ticket. Why?
- (ii) How did he escape the ticket collector’s attention?

Answer:

(i) Velu left his village as he was annoyed with his drunkard father who used to grab away all that he and his sisters earned and spent it on drink. Hence, he travelled without a ticket because he had no money to buy a train ticket for himself.

(ii) Velu could escape the ticket collector’s attention because luckily the ticket collector didn’t come to the unreserved compartment. He tried to sleep on the floor near the door as he had no ticket.

Question 4:

Why had Velu run away from home?

Answer:

Velu was from a poor family and he and his sisters would work hard for a living. But his drunkard father would snatch away all their earnings and spent it on drinking. The little boy ran away from his home as he was very annoyed with his father.

Question 5:

Why did he decide to follow the ‘strange’ girl?

Answer:

Velu decided to follow the 'strange girl' because he was new in the big city and didn't know where to go and what to do. Meanwhile, he was also very hungry and stressed as he had not eaten any food for the past two days.

Comprehension Check (Page 13)**Question 1:**

Can Velu read Tamil and English? How do you know?

Answer:

Velu could not read the huge signboards that were written in English as he didn't know what it meant. However, when he walked past the Central Jail, he squinted and read it as it was written in Tamil.

Question 2:

"If you are not careful, you will soon be counting bars there," the girl said.

(i) What is she referring to?

(ii) What does she mean when she says "If you are not careful..."?

(She says something a little later which means the same. Find that sentence.)

Answer:

(i) She was referring to the Central Jail.

(ii) When she said to Velu, "If you are not careful...", she meant that he should never get caught to be put behind the bars. Besides, she also meant that they should be extra cautious and not do anything stupid in order to avoid getting caught by the policemen.

The other sentence which the girl told him was - "You don't have to do anything. Just don't get caught, that's all."

Question 3:

(i) Where did the girl lead Velu to?

(ii) What did they get to eat?

Answer:

(i) The girl led Velu to a big wedding hall and rushed behind it where there was a big garbage bin overflowing with rubbish. She picked up a squashy banana and held it out to him as she knew he was starving and quickly picked up a vada and gave him to eat.

(ii) Velu got a squashy banana and a vada, whereas the girl only got a banana to eat.

Question 4:

What work did she do? Think of a one-word answer.

Answer:

The girl worked as a rag-picker.

Comprehension Check (Page 15)

Question 1:

- (i) What material are the 'strange' huts made out of?
- (ii) Why does Velu find them strange?

Answer:

(i) The 'strange' huts were built out of all sorts of things such as metal sheets, tyres, bricks, wood and plastic.

(ii) In Velu's village, the houses were made of mud and palm leaves. But he found the huts in the city to be strange because they were made up of different stuffs such as metal sheets, tyres, bricks, wood and plastic. They stood crookedly and looked as if they would fall any moment. He had actually visited a slum area for the first time and he was quite surprised by looking at them and wondered how people lived in them and from where did they get such stuff to build their huts.

Question 2:

What sort of things did Jaya and children like her collect and what did they do with those things?

Answer:

Jaya and other children like her collected paper, plastic, glass and other similar things. They sold all these things to Jam Bazaar Jaggu, who further sold it to a nearby factory.

Question 3:

Is Velu happy or unhappy to find work? Give a reason for your answer.

Answer:

Although Velu had run away from his home, he was unhappy to find the work of a rag-picker as he had to dig through garbage bins. He remembered that the only work he had ever done was on the landowner's farm, weeding and taking cows out to graze. However, he decided to work as a rag-picker for the meantime until he found a better job for himself.

Exercise (Page 16)

Discuss the following questions in small groups. Write their answers afterwards.

Question 1:

Is Velu a smart boy? Which instances in the text show that he is or isn't?

Answer:

Velu was initially a very naive boy who ran away from his village to avoid the torture of his drunkard father. However, when he arrived at a big city, Chennai he felt lost and miserable among so many people. Soon he met Jaya, a rag-picker who helped him to get some food as she realised he was starving. From then on, Velu acted smartly by following her as he didn't know where to go and what to

do in such a big city. On his way, he read the Central Jail hoarding written in Tamil and Jaya warned him that he should not do anything stupid and should avoid getting caught by the policemen. He kept following her until she took him to the slum area where he saw the strange huts which were made up of metal sheets, tyres, bricks, wood and plastic. They stood crookedly and looked as if they would fall any moment. Soon Jaya told him how she and other children collected glass, paper and other stuff and hand it over Jam Bazaar Jaggu, who further sold it to a factory nearby. Seeing all this, Velu agreed to work as a rag-picker like Jaya for the time being until he finds a suitable job for himself.

Question 2:

Do you think Jaya is a brave and sensitive child with a sense of humour? Find instances of her courage, kind nature and humour in the text.

Answer:

Yes, Jaya was a brave and sensitive child with a good sense of humour. She was of the same age as Velu and worked as a rag-picker and knew well how to survive in the city. She knew all the roads across the city and was also aware where she can find food to eat. However, when she met Velu in the railway station, she roamed about the city with him by collecting glass, paper and bottles and also got him some food to eat from a garbage bin behind a wedding hall. She tried to help him in all possible ways and told him to join her in rag-picking work. She gave him a pair of old shoes without laces and pushed a sack and a stick into his hands. However, we also notice that she has a humorous nature when she asks Velu if he had come at Chennai to become a rich person. She also helps him to cross the busy streets and told him that if he continues to stand still in the middle of the road like that, he would get run over by the huge vehicles unnecessarily.

Question 3:

What one throws away as waste may be valuable to others. Do you find this sentence meaningful in the context of this story? How?

Answer:

The story "Children at work" depicts the sad plight of slum dwellers, mostly the children who have to work as rag-pickers to sustain and feed themselves in big cities. It shows how the rubbish that we throw away in the garbage is being collected by these children to make a livelihood for themselves. People throw away leftover food, bottles and paper which are collected by these children and they earn money by selling these to nearby factories. As a matter of fact, a waste thrown away by someone becomes a blessing or a source of income for another. Therefore, difficult circumstances compel such children to work as ragpickers and earn a living from it.